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DEADPOOL

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CURRENT *DEADPOOL* WORDSMITH ***DANIEL "NO FREAKIN'" WAY*** IS UP NEXT IN ***"MAKE WAY FOR DEADPOOL."*** DAN'S A PERFECT FIT TO WRITE A GUY LIKE DEADPOOL. I SURE LOOK UP TO WADE, BUT BETWEEN YOU AND ME, THE GUY'S A LITTLE TROUBLED. INSANE, DEADLY, HIDEOUSLY SCARRED... IT WAS THOSE ATTRIBUTES THAT CONVINCED ME DAN WAS THE MAN FOR THE JOB. YOU'LL BE HOOKED TOO IF YOU PICK UP HIS *DEADPOOL*. AS EVER, *SPOTLIGHT* SHOWS YOU THE WAY!

"FUNKY 'POOL MEDINA" IS THE FUNNIEST ARTICLE TITLE YOU'LL READ THIS WEEK. I SNORTED MILK THROUGH MY NOSE WHEN I READ IT, AND YOU'VE NO IDEA HOW NASTY THAT IS IN THIS MASK. PUTTING THE FUNK INTO DEADPOOL THESE DAYS IS ARTIST EXTRAORDINAIRE ***"POTENT" PACO MEDINA***. HE SPILLS TO *SPOTLIGHT* ALL THE DETAILS ABOUT WORKING WITH DANIEL WAY, AND WHAT IT IS THAT MAKES THEM SUCH AN EXQUISITE COCKTAIL O' CARNAGE AND CRAZINESS. TAKE A SIP, GO ON, YOU KNOW YOU WANT TO.

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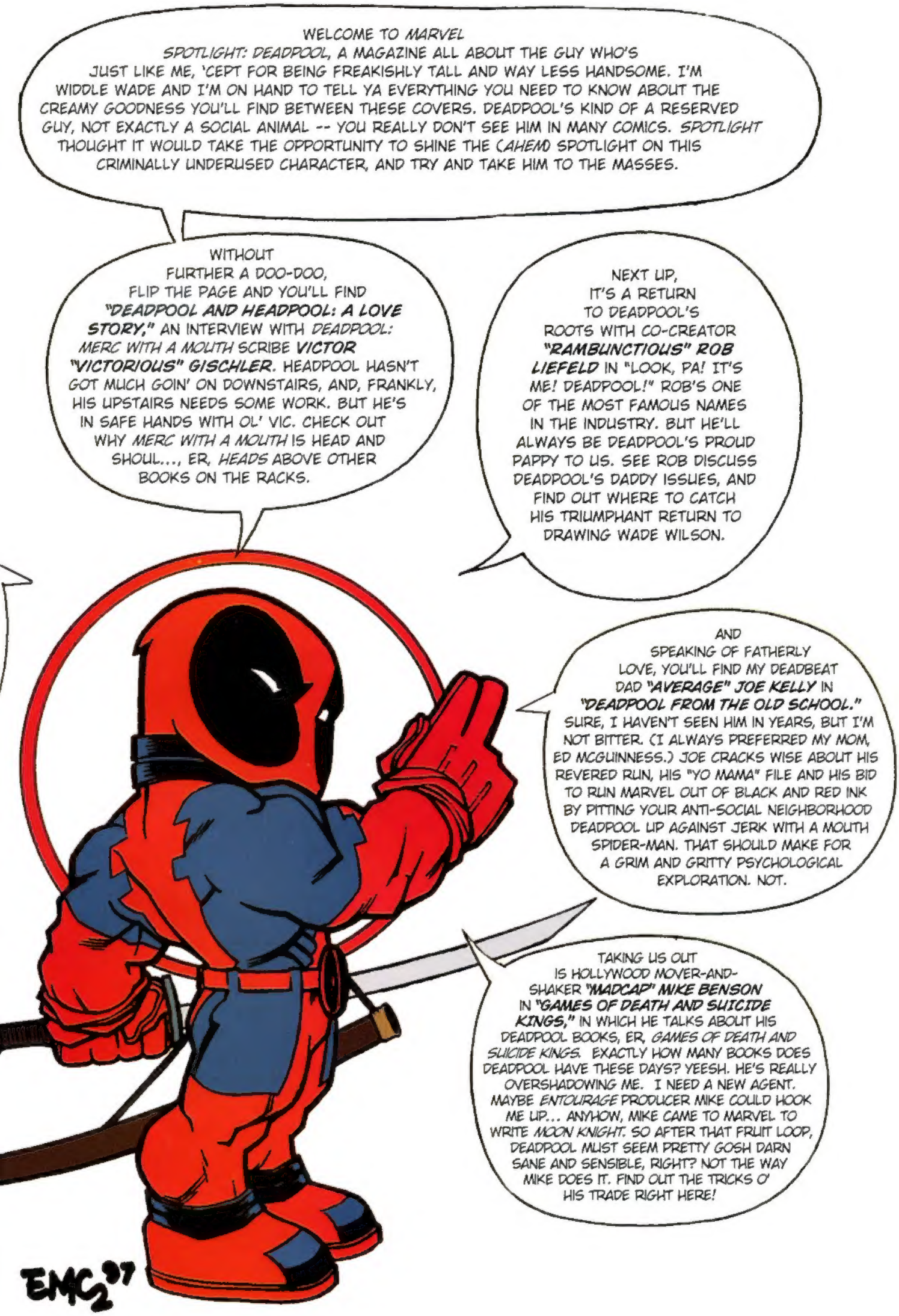

WELCOME TO *MARVEL SPOTLIGHT: DEADPOOL*, A MAGAZINE ALL ABOUT THE GUY WHO'S JUST LIKE ME, 'CEPT FOR BEING FREAKISHLY TALL AND WAY LESS HANDSOME. I'M WIDDLE WADE AND I'M ON HAND TO TELL YA EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE CREAMY GOODNESS YOU'LL FIND BETWEEN THESE COVERS. DEADPOOL'S KIND OF A RESERVED GUY, NOT EXACTLY A SOCIAL ANIMAL -- YOU REALLY DON'T SEE HIM IN MANY COMICS. *SPOTLIGHT* THOUGHT IT WOULD TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHINE THE *CAHEMO* SPOTLIGHT ON THIS CRIMINALLY UNDERUSED CHARACTER, AND TRY AND TAKE HIM TO THE MASSES.
WITHOUT FURTHER A DOO-DOO, FLIP THE PAGE AND YOU'LL FIND ***"DEADPOOL AND HEADPOOL: A LOVE STORY,"*** AN INTERVIEW WITH *DEADPOOL: MERC WITH A MOUTH* SCRIBE ***VICTOR "VICTORIOUS" GISCHLER***. HEADPOOL HASN'T GOT MUCH GOIN' ON DOWNSTAIRS, AND, FRANKLY, HIS UPSTAIRS NEEDS SOME WORK. BUT HE'S IN SAFE HANDS WITH OL' VIC. CHECK OUT WHY *MERC WITH A MOUTH* IS HEAD AND SHOUL..., ER, *HEADS* ABOVE OTHER BOOKS ON THE RACKS.
NEXT UP, IT'S A RETURN TO DEADPOOL'S ROOTS WITH CO-CREATOR ***"RAMBUNCTIOUS" ROB LIEFELD*** IN "LOOK, PA! IT'S ME! DEADPOOL!" ROB'S ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS NAMES IN THE INDUSTRY. BUT HE'LL ALWAYS BE DEADPOOL'S PROUD PAPPY TO US. SEE ROB DISCUSS DEADPOOL'S DADDY ISSUES, AND FIND OUT WHERE TO CATCH HIS TRIUMPHANT RETURN TO DRAWING WADE WILSON.
AND SPEAKING OF FATHERLY LOVE, YOU'LL FIND MY DEADBEAT DAD ***"AVERAGE" JOE KELLY*** IN ***"DEADPOOL FROM THE OLD SCHOOL."*** SURE, I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM IN YEARS, BUT I'M NOT BITTER. (I ALWAYS PREFERRED MY MOM, ED MCGUINNESS.) JOE CRACKS WISE ABOUT HIS REVERED RUN, HIS "YO MAMA" FILE AND HIS BID TO RUN MARVEL OUT OF BLACK AND RED INK BY PITTING YOUR ANTI-SOCIAL NEIGHBORHOOD DEADPOOL UP AGAINST JERK WITH A MOUTH SPIDER-MAN. THAT SHOULD MAKE FOR A GRIM AND GRITTY PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLORATION. NOT.
TAKING US OUT IS HOLLYWOOD MOVER-AND-SHAKER ***"MADCAP" MIKE BENSON*** IN ***"GAMES OF DEATH AND SUICIDE KINGS,"*** IN WHICH HE TALKS ABOUT HIS DEADPOOL BOOKS, ER, *GAMES OF DEATH AND SUICIDE KINGS*. EXACTLY HOW MANY BOOKS DOES DEADPOOL HAVE THESE DAYS? YEESH. HE'S REALLY OVERSHADOWING ME. I NEED A NEW AGENT. MAYBE *ENTOURAGE* PRODUCER MIKE COULD HOOK ME UP... ANYHOW, MIKE CAME TO MARVEL TO WRITE *MOON KNIGHT*. SO AFTER THAT FRUIT LOOP, DEADPOOL MUST SEEM PRETTY GOSH DARN SANE AND SENSIBLE, RIGHT? NOT THE WAY MIKE DOES IT. FIND OUT THE TRICKS O' HIS TRADE RIGHT HERE!
EMC2 '97

Deadpool and Headpool: A Love Story

By Dugan Trodglen

Go Go Girls Of The Apocalypse Author Victor Gischler Takes Deadpool And His Severed Zombie Noggin' On A Hilarious Head Trip!

Whoever would have thought that crazy old Deadpool would suddenly spike so high in popularity that he could support a second ongoing title? Well, it's happened! There needed to be a twist, though – something to differentiate it from the other monthly Deadpool comic. How about…a decapitated zombie Deadpool head? That's right, in *Deadpool: Merc With A Mouth,* Wade Wilson's co-star is his bodily-challenged undead doppelganger – "Headpool," if you will – a refugee from the *Marvel Zombies* Universe. The book, written by Victor Gischler and drawn by Bong Dazo, actually manages to up the "off the wall" quotient from the "core" Deadpool book, as the two 'Pools and their "sexy librarian" sidekick, Dr. Betty, traverse the globe getting into the kind of trouble only a truly fevered imagination could come up with.

That imagination belongs to author Victor Gischler. Fairly new to Marvel, he has written several novels, with titles like *Go Go Girls of the Apocalypse,* which suggest he's of the right mind (or the right "wrong" mind) to handle Deadpool. In *Spotlight's* last issue [*You of course picked up Marvel Spotlight: Marvel Zombies Return. Right? – Ed.*], we talked to Victor about his use the zombie head, but here we thought we'd get to know a little more about the writer and his plans for the title character.

Variant cover to ***Deadpool: Merc With A Mouth #1*** by Ed McGuinness.

Writer Victor Gischler

SPOTLIGHT: Victor, most folks reading this are probably not overly familiar with your name. You come from the land of "book books," a place where Axel Alonso has already picked up a few names. [*Like Charlie Huston, Gregg Hurwitz and Duane Swierczynski. – Ed.*] How did you land at Marvel and how do your books and comic book work match up?

VICTOR: In 2001 my first novel came out. It was called *Gun Monkeys* and it was sort of a neo-noir hard-boiled style mixed with dark humor, as are a lot of my crime books. It came out on a small press but it received an Edgar Award nomination and that led to my next few books coming out on Bantam Dell. My most recent novel – for Simon and Schuster – is *Vampire A Go-Go*, which features vampires, werewolves, alchemists, ghosts and things like that. (And some zombies I should say!) That and my previous book *Go-Go Girls of the Apocalypse* are sort of genre parodies.

I think what happened was I had been looking for a new agent when I signed with David Hale Smith, who also happens to be *Incredible Hulk* writer Greg Pak's, and Greg Rucka's agent. He has some comic book industry connections, in other words, and I said to him, "You know, if you want to hook me up with some of that sweet comic book work that would be all right with me." (*Laughter.*) He said, "Yeah, let's do that," but a year went by and I heard nothing and I assumed it hadn't worked out.

"It's sort of a buddy picture. Sort of a Hope and Crosby thing."

–Writer Victor Gischler on *Deadpool: Merc With A Mouth*

But one day he called and told me that he had sent some of my work to Axel Alonso and he wanted to talk to me. Axel read a couple of my novels and I guess decided I was a good match for some things and there were some possibilities there. He had me do a Punisher one-shot (*Punisher MAX Special: Little Black Book*), which is not unusual at all for trying out new writers. It seemed to go very well and I enjoyed doing it. Axel then offered a *Punisher MAX* story arc ("Welcome to the Bayou" from *Punisher: Frank Castle #71-74*), which I was happy to do, along with a Wolverine one-shot (*Wolverine: Revolver*).

SPOTLIGHT: How did that turn into the Deadpool assignment?

VICTOR: There was always talk about what I might do next, and when this Deadpool project came up Axel thought I'd be a good match. I think that goes back not only to the comics work but the fact that my novels have that combination of violence/action with dark humor. That seemed to be on target for what was needed for Deadpool.

So Axel called me up and asked, "Do you know who Deadpool is?" I said "Sure, I know Deadpool." He sent me some copies of Daniel Way's *Deadpool* to get me caught up on what's been going on, and I thought, "Man, this is such a great character" and it worked out great. I just turned in the script to issue 5 and I'm getting ready to roll on issue 6 and I love doing it. I get great feedback from Axel and everybody. It encourages me that I'm doing it right and I'm just having a ball.

CULT OF DEADPOOL: Gischler's hilarious setup involves an indigenous Savage Land cult that worships Deadpool. (Art from *D:MWAM #1* by Bong Dazo.)

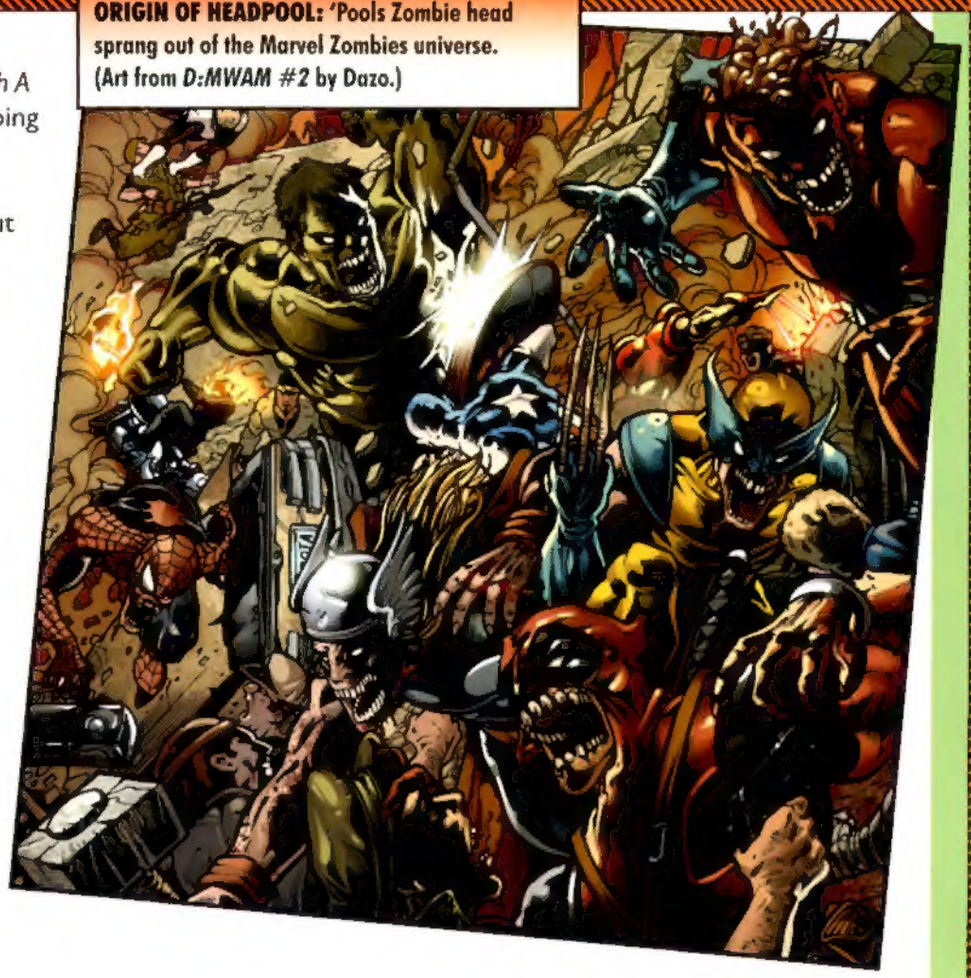
SPOTLIGHT: How does scripting work for you? For instance, writers who are new to comics aren't used to working with an artist and knowing the right amount of information to give them in a script.

VICTOR: If it's a panel that I think the artist can just go to town on any way they want to I try to lay off and let the artist rely on their own strengths. If it's something important for the story or if something has to happen in one panel that sets up something coming up then I will get more detailed. It depends on what is necessary.

I have very little contact with the artists directly, except for Bong. On *Punisher*, (artist) Goran Parlov would say, "I need a little bit more. What's Frank doing in this panel?" So I had to fill in more detail. But I gotta tell you, Bong Dazo has been amazing. I'll write something and think, "If Bong can picture what I'm picturing, this should work okay," and then he'll come back with something five times better. So Bong can take the least little bit of information and turn it into a masterpiece. He gets full credit for that.

But when I have a very specific idea for how I want a panel to look, I feel like a Director of Photography for a film. Bong seems to have the ability to pick up immediately on what I'm going for and just deliver. Hopefully I'm doing my job, but I've been very fortunate to have been hooked up with a guy who knows panel-by-panel what needs to happen.

ORIGIN OF HEADPOOL: 'Pools Zombie head sprang out of the Marvel Zombies universe. (Art from *D:MWAM #2* by Dazo.)



SPOTLIGHT: Was *Deadpool: Merc With A Mouth* always intended as a second ongoing series?

VICTOR: Pretty close. We talked about doing a couple of arcs before it was decided that, yeah, this needed to be an ongoing. I couldn't tell you how happy I was for that. We're about to come to the end of our first six-issue arc, but that story flows right into the second arc almost like a big 12-issue story. I'm looking forward to putting the lid on issue 6 and then calling Axel and going over the next story. I think Axel has a strong idea about what works on a book like this and we work well together. I'll send him an idea and he'll ask the right questions to bring out what we need to know about the arc and how to construct it.

I'm trying to think of one negative but I just can't! I want to seem "balanced" and "reasonable" in my answers! (*Laughter.*) All I've done is gushed!

SPOTLIGHT: Well, this isn't *60 Minutes*, sir!

VICTOR: Well, I just want to seem credible, you know? (*Laughter.*)

HUNGRY HEADPOOL! Our hero channels Little Shop of Horrors to a hapless Hydra agent in *D:MWAM #3.* (Art by Dazo.)

SPOTLIGHT: So you read Daniel Way's *Deadpool.* How did you come up with what your take would be? How *Deadpool: Merc With A Mouth* would be different?

VICTOR: When Axel and I were discussing that, we decided one of the things we came up with is that we wanted the stage to seem big. He starts out in a space station; he goes down to the Savage Land. We wanted a global scope. And while Daniel's book is certainly very funny, when I consider the balance a Deadpool book needs between action and humor, I tend toward the humor side more.

When I write it I tend toward the humor side. That's not to say Daniel's isn't humorous. He's very funny. I'm taking my cue from him all the way. I read his run to get caught up on how Deadpool should be.

What's gonna happen, I think, is that question is gonna be easier to answer ten or twelve issues down the line, looking back. We'll see how this book has naturally evolved in another direction. That may not be much of an answer, but it's what I think will happen.

I will say bringing in that zombie head is a big deal. We sort of wanted a buddy picture feel for the book. I'm not going to go so far as to say that Deadpool has a sidekick now, but it almost works like that.

SPOTLIGHT: Daniel Way established a pair of "characters" to bounce thoughts off of: not one, but two voices in his head. What made you decide to keep this narrative device for your book?

VICTOR: Nobody told me to copy Daniel Way. But they did send me his issues and let me know they really liked what he was doing to reinvigorate the character. I sort of inferred that this was a good model for writing Deadpool. I didn't want to be the guy who came in and said, "Well I'm gonna do it my way; I'm gonna do it all different!" As I said when talking about the differences in the

"Bong can take the least little bit of information and turn it into a masterpiece."

– Gischler on art partner Bong Dazo.

"I didn't want to be the guy who came in and said, 'Well I'm gonna do it my way; I'm gonna do it all different!'"

– On being the new guy joining the Deadpool team.

book, I want anything I do differently to naturally evolve.

Having said that, I just turned in my script for issue 5 and I noticed I didn't use that inner monologue/dialogue as much. It's there, but not as much. I'd like to be able to use it as needed rather than force it in there. It's a tool I can use.

SPOTLIGHT: With the zombie head as a foil, it may not be as necessary as much.

VICTOR: And he has Dr. Betty in there as well. She is sort of the straight man who's easy on the eyes. She is so perfect for setting up things for Deadpool to say. I don't want her to be this two-dimensional prop where all she does is setup jokes. But she is useful in that role as well as being a character in her own right.

SPOTLIGHT: From what I gathered in the first issue, with her coming from AIM, she doesn't come across as a damsel in distress or someone who is totally freaked out by the Marvel Universe craziness going on around her.

VICTOR: She's not totally a civilian.

SPOTLIGHT: And getting back to the zombie head, you said he would be an ongoing part of the book.

VICTOR: Yeah. It's sort of a buddy picture. Sort of a Hope and Crosby thing. We're gonna get to know the zombie head. What I like is that he is a zombie reduced to the teeth and the Merc With a Mouth reduced to just The Mouth. Those sole aspects of the characters are boiled down to their essences.

SPOTLIGHT: Other than the current Deadpool series, are there any previous incarnations you're looking to in order to develop your take on the character? He's sort of evolved over the years from bad$%^ to more of the humorous character we know now.

VICTOR: I was aware of Deadpool's existence, but not in a way where I could claim any expertise. He obviously has some awesome mercenary skills but I know him more as a humorous figure than as a badass. That's my experience with him.

SPOTLIGHT: It's almost like he's a new character anyway. Ever since he received the fresh start in *Wolverine: Origins* he's been on fire. It dovetails with the Wolverine movie a little bit, but I don't think that alone accounts for his new popularity.

VICTOR: I respect the fans that have loved Deadpool for a long time, but I agree with what you just said. I think he has a new lease on life and I like him like this a lot.

SPOTLIGHT: In this "global scale" comic, which character would you like to introduce as far as interacting with Deadpool?

MERC WITH HOMAGE: Cover artist extraordinaire Arthur Suydam is at it again, this time featuri

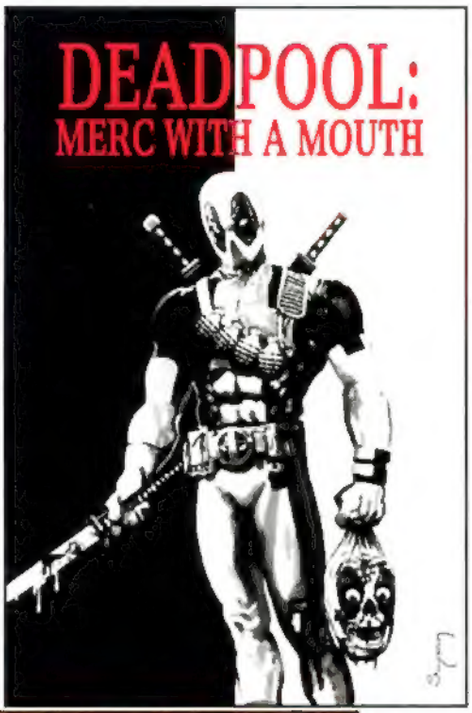
BONG DAZO: Merc With A Mouth's artist is a master of action panels and Deadpool's unique brand of cartoon violence. (Art from *D:MWAM #3.*)

VICTOR: That's a good question. I'm a little afraid to give anything away, but off the top of my head I'd love to see Deadpool hang out with Dr. Strange. I think Dr. Strange is the kind of guy who wouldn't want to tolerate Deadpool's antics. Whoever I picked, it would have to be as good as Bullseye in Daniel's book. And that would be difficult, because that was so great.

SPOTLIGHT: Well, it was neat seeing him with Ka-Zar in *Deadpool: Merc With A Mouth #1*. He was sort of the opposite of what you were describing with Dr. Strange. He seemed not at all put off by Deadpool.

VICTOR: It's interesting how that happened. When we were kicking around the concept for the book, Axel said, "This is the kind of book where Deadpool could go anywhere. He could go to the Amazon." And when he said "Amazon" I said, "Well how about the Savage Land? That's like the Amazon only cooler. There's dinosaurs; he could hang out with Ka-Zar and everything." So Axel went and checked to make sure Ka-Zar was available and reported back that we could do it.

SPOTLIGHT: I like how when they parted ways Ka-Zar said "Farewell my friend!" I don't think anyone – ever – has said that to Deadpool.



ng Deadpool in homages to famous film classics.

VICTOR: It's so fun to write stuff like that. I read Ka-Zar as a kid and now I get to write what he says. He can say anything I want him to!

Deadpool, his alternate-reality zombie head, and Dr. Betty, all say whatever Victor Gischler wants them to in the monthly series DEADPOOL: MERC WITH A MOUTH. See if you can track down the first three issues, on sale now if your comic shop still has copies! Thanks to Victor for taking the time to chat with SPOTLIGHT and we'll see you in the very funny Deadpool book!

BLACK AND WHITE PREVIEW ART: Inked page from *Deadpool: Merc With A Mouth #4* by Bong Dazo. Zombie dinosaurs need to eat, too!

LOOK, PA! IT'S ME! DEADPOOL!

In 1991, Rob Liefeld Created One Of Marvel's Biggest Big Shots, Deadpool! (And He Hasn't Lived It Down Since!)

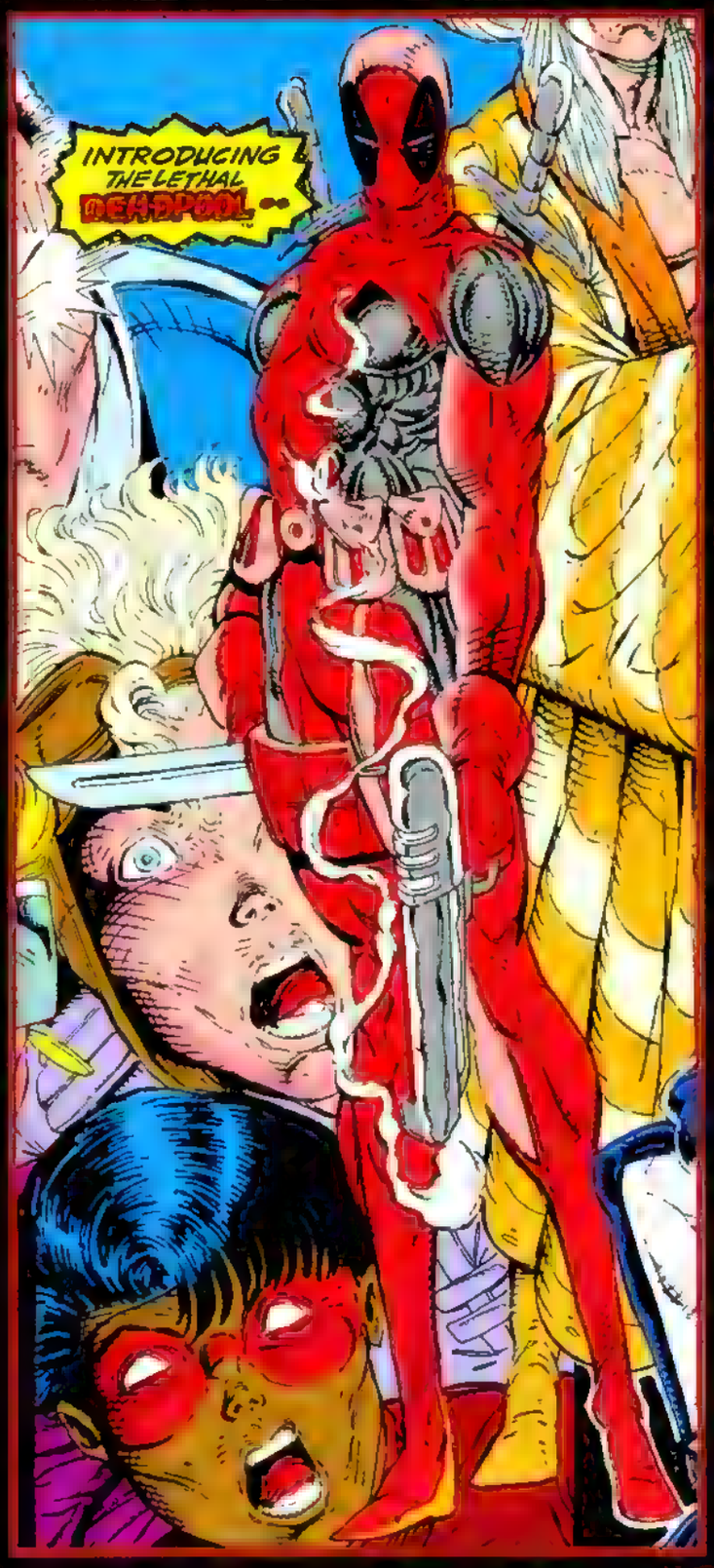
By Jess Harrold

When comic fans think of the 1990s, more likely than not they're picturing Rob Liefeld's art in their heads. Rob took the artistic reins for Marvel's motley band of *New Mutants* just as the decade began, and within a year had propelled the book up the sales charts and transformed it into the multi-million-selling phenomenon that was *X-Force*. By then one of the industry's highest profile stars, he left Marvel to form Image Comics with other luminaries such as Todd McFarlane, Erik Larsen and Marc Silvestri. But in that relatively short time, Rob had bequeathed the House of Ideas two of its newest, brightest stars. Cable may have hogged the limelight at first, the success of *New Mutants* and *X-Force* largely borne upon his notoriously broad shoulders. But a very different character, a an irreverent contrast to Cable's grim and gritty demeanor, has now hacked and slashed his way all the way to the top – none other than Deadpool. The regenerating degenerate waltzed right into *New Mutants* #98, making light work of the team and poking fun at his target, Cable. The Marvel Universe has not been the same since. And Rob – very much the proud father – wouldn't have it any other way. Back drawing the character for the upcoming *Deadpool* #900 special, Rob was all too happy to give *Spotlight* the lowdown on the craziest of all his creations.

Rob Liefeld preview art from *Deadpool* #900!

SPOTLIGHT: When you introduced Deadpool in *New Mutants* #98 did you have any idea exactly what you were unleashing on the Marvel Universe?

ROB: I thought he would be well received, but not to the extent that he has taken off. When I looked at the final pages of his first appearance, I thought, "Well, he looks cool, he's funny, he has a cool name and he takes out the entire New Mutants team all by himself, so he has a nice introduction..." But I wasn't prepared for the fan frenzy that ensued. X-Editor Bob Harras called me a few days after his first appearance and said: "We have to do more Deadpool, the fans LOVE him!" Which is why he appeared in a fact file in *New Mutants* #100, a trading card in *X-Force* #1 and had a huge role in *X-Force* #2 and then issue #10.



Cover art from *New Mutants* #98 by Liefeld, Deadpool's first appearance!

SPOTLIGHT: Now, 18 years later, Deadpool has matured – well, maybe *matured* isn't the right word – into one of the major players at Marvel. Is it something you take professional pride in, adding your own patch to the great Marvel quilt like that?

ROB: Of course! I take great pride in everything I create and when they reach the pinnacle of popularity, such as Cable and now Deadpool, it is remarkably satisfying.

SPOTLIGHT: When you measure Deadpool against your other Marvel creations like Cable, as well as your work elsewhere, how high does he rate in your personal list of achievements in comics?

ROB: Right now he's tops! How could he not be?

SPOTLIGHT: Are you someone who invests a lot personally in your characters? Do you find yourself reading later comics by other creators and going, "He would never say that?"

"I was out to create the anti-Spider-Man."

– Rob Liefeld, on his inspiration for Deadpool.

ROB: I follow all of it. It's great to see what directions and turns that other writers and artists take with the characters. Even when they took his costume off and Deadpool became Agent X and his popularity ebbed, I still enjoyed the approach.

SPOTLIGHT: With that in mind, what's your opinion on the direction Deadpool has taken over the years? Who do you think "got" him the best?

ROB: Well, the powers that be have returned to the tried and true formula of violence and action paired with humor that made Deadpool so popular at the outset. I think that Joe Kelly and Daniel Way are the two writers that have maximized Deadpool's voice. But everyone from Jimmy Palmiotti to Gail Simone, Michael Benson, Mark Waid and others have certainly done excellent work.

SPOTLIGHT: Casting our minds back to those halcyon '90s days, can you remember much about the day you first came up with Deadpool? Caffeine high, sugar rush?

ROB: Lots of Mountain Dew, definitely! I was out to create the anti-Spider Man. There's a lot of Spidey in there! I've always stated that I was envious of Todd McFarlane drawing Spider-Man and his cool mask. I set out to duplicate that somewhat with the big eye motif and made sure Deadpool was leaner, agile, bouncy – like Spidey. Then I gave him an arsenal of weapons and we made him a smartass and the next thing you know we had hit the jackpot!

YOU'RE NATHAN, RIGHT?
I'M DEADPOOL. PLEASED TO MEET YOU.
MR. TOLLIVER HIRED ME TO FIND YOU.
AND YOU HAVE.
YUP. WELL, MR. TOLLIVER ALSO HIRED ME TO KILL YOU.

CONTRACT FOR CABLE: Deadpool is out for Cable's blood in *NM* #98. (Art by Liefeld.)

SPOTLIGHT: As for his personality, his fast lip and wisecracks to distract opponents also brings a certain wallcrawler to mind. Do you think Wade has much in common with Peter?

ROB: Well, no, Deadpool is a tortured product of an aborted Weapon X experiment. He's a mental madman, closer to the Joker wrapped in the body of a deadly killer who believes he has nothing to lose. Other than his ability to crack jokes, he's nothing like Peter Parker.

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of jokes, he's cracking wise right from word go in his debut, telling Cable: "Let me put you out of my misery." But what was your favorite Deadpool crack?

ROB: Too many to mention. I think he's always got something funny to say.

SPOTLIGHT: And in that same issue, Cable and X-Force are desperate to shut him up. Nate just about breaks his jaw, and when he gets mailed back to Tolliver he's been gagged. Did it amuse you when they did much the same to Ryan Reynolds in *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*?

ROB: Oh yeah, I loved him in the Wolverine movie. People approached me all summer asking, "What did you think?" And I said, well, it was a good start. It's true to the comics in that he's still an aborted product of Weapon X and it gives him the foundation to create his own mythos in film just as he did in the comics. It speaks to how popular he is that so many fans were frustrated that he wasn't in the film more prominently. Had they put him in his costume at the end credits, people would have freaked and they would have added many more millions to their grosses.

SPOTLIGHT: Now, you're a creator who, shall we say, divides opinion amongst fans. And Deadpool

COULD BE BETTER COULD BE WORSE
WE WERE DOING OKAY AGAINST DEADPOOL!
YEAH, SURE--AND YOU DIDN'T NEED ANY HELP. DID YOU?
LET'S NOT SPEND TOO MUCH TIME TRYING TO TAKE THE CREDIT FOR THIS PUNK'S CAPTURE.
WHAT DO WE DO WITH YOU NOW, DEADPOOL?
Y'KNOW I'VE ALWAYS WANTED THE CHANCE TO REHABILITATE MYSELF--YOU KNOW, SOMEWHERE NICE...
HOW ABOUT A PRISON IN THE BAHAMAS?

BEST BUDDIES: Cable would never battle Deadpool regularly if not as war against his relentlessly wisecracking pal, Deadpool! (Art from *NM #98* by Liefeld.)

isn't exactly universally popular in the Marvel Universe. We have to ask: How much of you is there in Deadpool? Are you more like Wade in real life, or Cable?

ROB: I'm certainly more like Wade. I'm a wiseacre as well and I'm always upbeat in the face of conflict. I'm not as grim as Cable.

SPOTLIGHT: Your good pal and Deadpool co-creator Fabian Nicieza teamed them up in *Cable and Deadpool* – what is it that makes them two great tastes that taste great together?

ROB: They counterbalance each other perfectly; they are the "Odd Couple." Great balance, classic "opposites attract."

SPOTLIGHT: Wade's origin has been explored quite a bit by other creators – how closely does it fit with what you had in mind when you created him? Had you figured out a whole backstory?

ROB: He was always a bitter product of Weapon X, a bad experiment, thus the connection with the whole program. He fled the Weapon X program and used his skills and abilities and enhancements to bolster himself as a mercenary. There was no love interest or daddy issues or other details other than that. By tying into the Weapon X program I thought there was plenty of material to mine.

SPOTLIGHT: You mentioned Joe Kelly earlier, and he is certainly one of the writers who has had the most impact on the character. Now you're working on his return to the character in the landmark *Deadpool* #900. Have you enjoyed reacquainting yourself with Wade, and working with Joe?

ROB: Oh yeah! Joe is great and this story in *Deadpool* #900 is so funny. He gave me what any Deadpool collaborator would want: guns, action, babes and great gags! I hope the fans enjoy it.

SPOTLIGHT: I heard a little Tweet that we're finally gonna see what's inside those pouches...

ROB: Yes, Joe has Deadpool empty out the contents of his pouches and the stuff he described was pretty funny. Especially the little monkey!

SPOTLIGHT: We'll look out for it! Even including #900, you've actually written and drawn Deadpool surprisingly few times. Do you still have that one big Deadpool story you're itching to tell some day?

ROB: Yes, I do have one great Deadpool story I'd love to tell. It's called *Deadpool: Big Shot* and hopefully I'll get a chance to share it someday soon.

SPOTLIGHT: Lastly, if Deadpool were to ask you one question, what would it be? And how would you answer it?

ROB: He'd say, "Dad, what the hell were you thinking when you unleashed me on the world?" I would just shrug.

Look out, Rob. You answer with a shrug, 'Pool might reply with a slug! (Hey, don't blame us! We didn't invent the guy.) As it is we're mighty thankful your refrigerator wasn't empty of Mountain Dew on that fateful day you created Deadpool, and we'll definitely be looking out for your "one big Deadpool story" one day. Until then, we'll gladly take your story with Joe Kelly in DEADPOOL *#900, due in October!* •

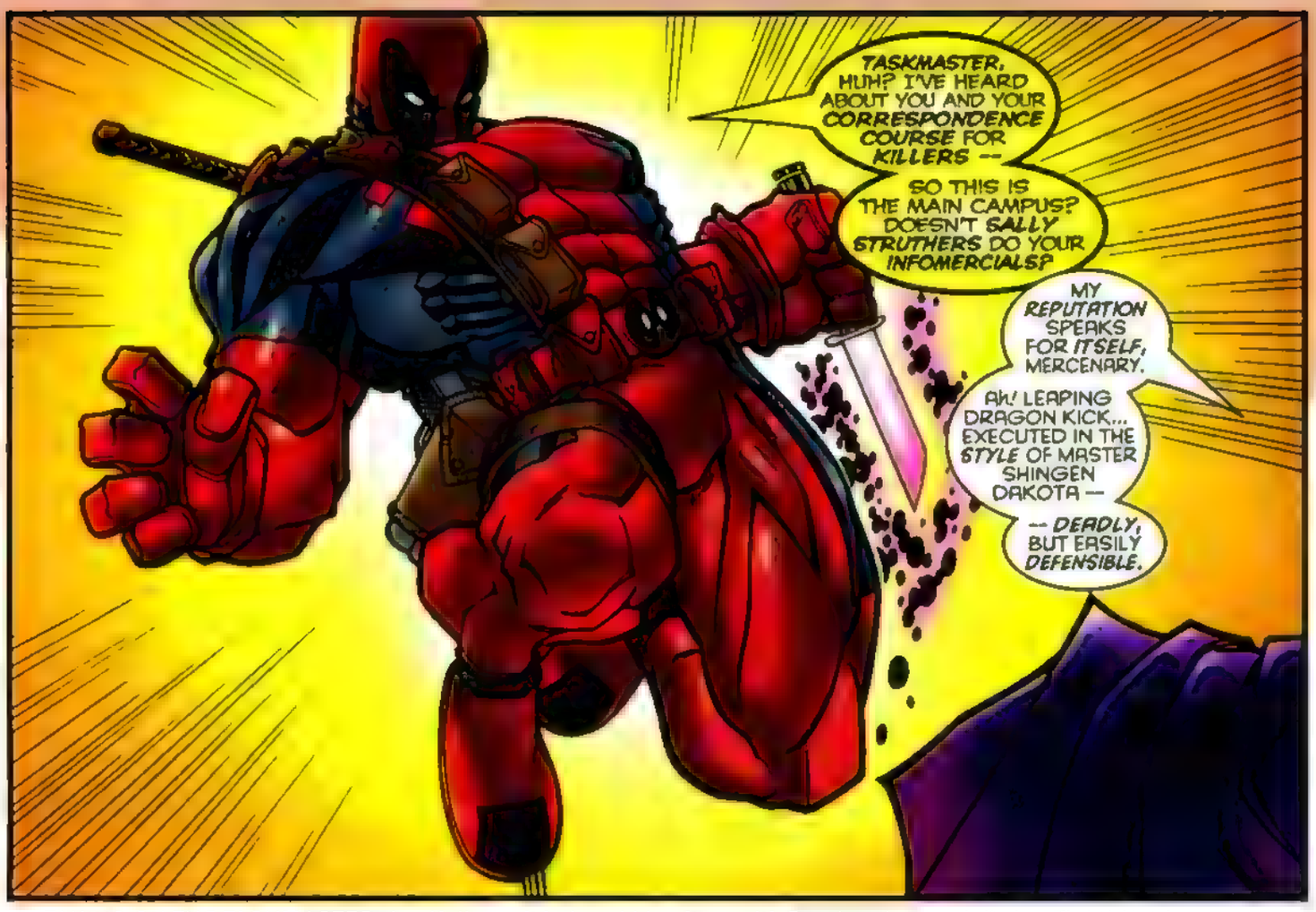
DEADPOOL FROM THE OLD SCHOOL

Writer Joe Kelly Revisits An Old Friend In Deadpool #900

DEADPOOL: JOE KELLY

By Jess Harrold

Back in 1997, the Marvel Universe was holding out for some heroes. Captain America, Iron Man, the Avengers and the Fantastic Four had fallen victim to Onslaught, their titles all taking place on a brand new Earth during the Heroes Reborn event. Stepping up to the plate in their absence? Alpha Flight, Ka-Zar and…Wade Wilson?!? Drawn away from the dark side by – what else? – a woman, everyone's favorite sassin' assassin, Deadpool, burst into his first ongoing series in a quest for redemption that would see him swear off killing and be declared a Messiah. And, at the helm, ensuring Deadpool was a merc with more mouth than ever was fresh young scribe Joe Kelly.


TASKMASTER, HUH? I'VE HEARD ABOUT YOU AND YOUR CORRESPONDENCE COURSE FOR KILLERS --
SO THIS IS THE MAIN CAMPUS? DOESN'T SALLY STRUTHERS DO YOUR INFOMERCIALS?
MY REPUTATION SPEAKS FOR ITSELF, MERCENARY.
AH! LEAPING DRAGON KICK... EXECUTED IN THE STYLE OF MASTER SHINGEN DAKOTA --
-- DEADLY, BUT EASILY DEFENSIBLE.

TAKING ON THE TASKMASTER: Joe Kelly can't help yukking it up with Deadpool, especially in a fight! (Art from *Deadpool* #2 by Ed McGuinness.)

In a three-year run that blended madcap humor, soul-searching pathos and some genuinely harrowing scenes, Joe built a platform for a career that has gone from strength to strength. He's written *X-Men*, *Action Comics* and *JLA*, and now he's a major player in the *Amazing Spider-Man* Web-Heads. Somewhere along the line he found time to co-create the cartoon sensation that is *Ben 10*. But you won't find blind, old-lady hostages on Cartoon Network. For that you'll need Joe's fan-favorite *Deadpool* comics, currently being collected for your convenience in *Deadpool Classic* trades. *Spotlight* locked Joe in the Deadhut and threatened him with The Box until he spilled all the details on his time with the character, and their upcoming reacquaintance in the pages of *Amazing Spider-Man* #611 and the very special *Deadpool* #900. Then we tickled him until he revealed the secret history of Blind Al!

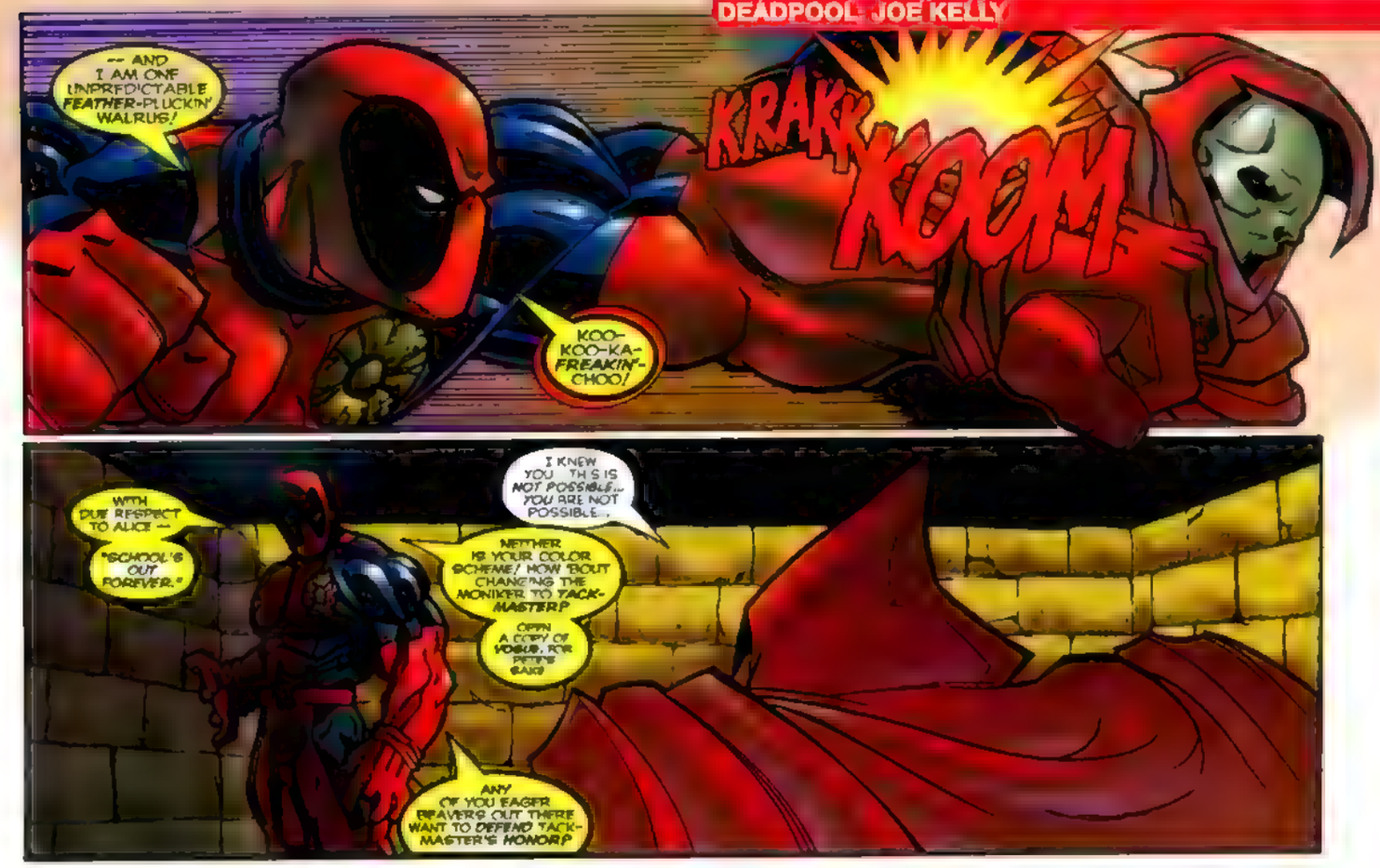
"It allowed me to have my mental diarrhea for Deadpool!" Writer Joe Kelly on the approach of his 1997 *Deadpool* series.

SPOTLIGHT: Your very first ongoing series was *Deadpool* with Ed McGuinness – are you the luckiest man in comics?

JOE: *(Laughter)* Definitely. My entire career is based on being at the right place at the right time so I'm very grateful about the way the universe has thrown things at me up to this point.

SPOTLIGHT: It was the right time for 'Pool too. His series started during *Heroes Reborn*, when there was a vacuum for heroes on Marvel Earth. While titles like *Alpha Flight*, *Ka-Zar* and *Maverick* were short-lived, *Deadpool* and *Thunderbolts* are still around to this day. Did that dreaded "C-word", cancellation, rear its head a lot back then?

JOE: Oh sure, but not until we were well into it. The irony is that we started the book believing we were gonna be cancelled within six or seven issues, so when editor Matt Idelson and I sat down to work out the series we kind of felt, let's just make this book different, have fun, do what the heck we want because it's gonna be gone. We might as well go out in a blaze of glory. And since everybody else thought it would be cancelled, nobody really paid attention and we got to do whatever we wanted. I think the threat of cancellation was our strength at the beginning. But it wasn't until around the time we left that the numbers were on the edge. One month they'd say you're going to be cancelled, the next month they'd say, "We got a lot of fan letters so you can stay." This went on for four or five months and I just couldn't plan out stories that way. If that had not happened, there's an excellent chance I would have stayed on the book at least another year, if not longer. I sort of


-- AND I AM ONE UNPREDICTABLE FEATHER-PLUCKIN' WALRUS!
KRAKK
KOOM
KOO-KOO-KA-FREAKIN'-CHOO!
WITH DUE RESPECT TO ALICE --
"SCHOOL'S OUT FOREVER."
I KNEW YOU THIS IS NOT POSSIBLE... YOU ARE NOT POSSIBLE...
NEITHER IS YOUR COLOR SCHEME! HOW 'BOUT CHANGING THE MONIKER TO TACK-MASTER?
OPEN A COPY OF VOGUE, FOR PETE'S SAKE!
ANY OF YOU EAGER BEAVERS OUT THERE WANT TO DEFEND TACK-MASTER'S HONOR?

forget that it started during *Heroes Reborn*. But the initial pitch for *Deadpool* had him actually carrying Franklin Richard's ball around for the whole year, like he didn't know he had the entire universe in his possession. He was bouncing it, abusing it for twelve issues, and couldn't figure out why everybody wanted to kill him. But that was tossed out because it was too big for our little book that would inevitably be cancelled!

SPOTLIGHT: 'Pool had already had a few appearances and a couple of limited series under his belt, but it was your run that fully fleshed out his character, particularly his more heroic side, and explored his history. Were you told how to play the character, or given an "untold origin" you had to stick to?

JOE: Y'know, I was really lucky. Matt and I went through the series the guys had done before, which were very cool and we really liked. We obviously wanted to keep the humor, and keep it as dark as possible, but after that point it was really open. We were allowed to mess around. Even to the point where, although I know it was subsequently changed, we got it where he wasn't really Wade Wilson and had stolen that identity. With the back story, you just go, OK, he was with Weapon X, we don't know exactly when that was…It's a big playground, and you know it's already half there, but you find your own corner and build your jungle gym there. That's how we did it.

SPOTLIGHT: You mentioned keeping the humor of his early appearances – you dialed that up to 11.

JOE: Well, thank you. I love comedy and especially dark comedy. I want the pendulum always to swing between hilarious and dark within the same story as often as possible. It keeps the reader off balance. Those are the kind of movies I respond to. In comics, we have that conceit where you can say an awful lot in one panel. While a guy is flying through the air kicking somebody in the face, you can have five balloons. It allowed me to have my mental diarrhea for Deadpool! I love that stuff. And I guess at the time, a lot of the books were so serious. So, to be that little light where it's, like, I'm gonna do dark stories and I have an anti-hero, but you know you're gonna get stupid jokes and other comedy from month to month, really helped.

SPOTLIGHT: Does it take longer to script when you have so many one-liners and gags?

JOE: Writing for me as a process really is one of two things – it's either extremely easy or extremely hard; there's no middle ground. With *Deadpool*, if I was on and I was channeling his voice the right way it would flow, and I would be laughing. But sometimes it's like pulling teeth. It can really kill me, because I know I want it to be funny, and my expectations are high. Sometimes it's, like, am I the only one who's gonna find this funny, or did I already run this joke? That's the beauty of having a good editor, and Matt was always fantastic to bounce stuff off. He'd make suggestions and if something weren't funny we'd cut it. He would call me if I was repeating myself. Or was going soft, or too rough!

SPOTLIGHT: Did you carry a notebook around to record jokes when they came to you?

JOE: I'm pretty good: If I get struck with an idea, I repeat it over and over until I can get to a pad. It would be easier to carry a pad, but I don't. When I was writing *Deadpool*, I spent a lot of time trolling the internet and collecting, like, "Your mother…"

jokes. I have a huge file of "Yo mama's so fat..." If I couldn't think of something off the top of my head I could always go to the "Yo mama" file. Even if I didn't rip them off directly, it would inspire something. I was definitely collecting humor at that point. I had a lot on tap when I was writing *Deadpool*. Not so much when I was writing *Superman*; then I was a lot more honest, compassionate...

— HE'S CLEAR! DEADPOOL'S DONE IT AGAIN, SPORTS FANS! A NEW WORLD'S RECORD!
CHAMPAGNE AND CORN NUTS FOR EVERYONE!
NOW, RIGHT AFTER YET ANOTHER LOOK AT THAT KERR/STRUS VAULT, WE'LL GO TO THE MEDAL CEREMONY—
— BUT FIRST, A FEW WORDS OF ANGUISH FROM OUR SPONSOR

SPOTLIGHT: Do you find the characters get in your head that way when you're immersed in them?

JOE: I think so, yeah. Sometimes I'm more aware of it than others Deadpool was one of those great characters that I always felt a really strong emotional connection to. He was my baby. So to sculpt this world where no matter what he did he was gonna screw up, whether it was his own bad intentions or bad nature or just the world at large putting him in horrible positions, I could spend a lot of time really crafting that. Other than creator-owned books I haven't had that since. I'm amazed at guys like Geoff Johns who can carve out their world, and a big world at that, that takes a lot of effort. To have that on *Deadpool* was a really precious thing and I do miss it some days. I like that kind of immersion, but when I get it, I'm, like, "*I wish I had more projects*!" Freelancers are a superstitious and cowardly lot!

SUPER-GENIUS-SIDEKICK-WEAPONS-BOY LIKE YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIGURE IT OUT
GOOD LORD IS THIS --
YES, WHERE YOUR BOSS, DEADPOOL, THROWS ME WHENEVER I TRY AND ESCAPE MY LIFE-LONG PRISONER STATUS...

DARK DEADPOOL: Kelly balanced hijinks with just the right balance of harrowing horror. (Art from *Deadpool #14* by Walter McDaniel.)

JOE: I went back to stuff from my childhood. As dark as *Deadpool* is, all that *Bugs Bunny* and Warner Bros. stuff really did have an influence on me. Also Robin Williams just in general, and probably – and embarrassingly so – Mork from Ork in particular. Robin's stand-up had that chaotic nature

SPOTLIGHT: I see Bruce Willis' *Moonlighting* character David Addison at his most self-destructive...

JOE: Oh yeah. I would not have picked that off the top of my head, but that was definitely a favorite show of mine. I'm trying to think who else...certainly Tarantino, he was very big when I was writing that book. That sort of writing style was really part of it. I've always been influenced by the Coen Brothers and other surrealistic artist/playwrights. I think that really helps a lot for comics, especially with a character like Deadpool, just that permission to mess around with the story and the audience; to take a road that is completely unexpected

SPOTLIGHT: And who would have thought

twelve years ago we'd see Deadpool on the silver screen?

JOE: That was really cool. Ryan Reynolds has been gunning for that role for a really long time. A bunch of years ago another journalist I know contacted me after talking to him about *Blade: Trinity*. He was like, dude, do you know that Ryan Reynolds is all over Deadpool, and just wants to be Deadpool? I thought that was cool. To see it finally happening was great.

SPOTLIGHT: You were blessed with a succession of great artists, from Ed to Pete Woods to Walter McDaniel, each of whom brought tremendous expression to Deadpool's ostensibly featureless mask.

JOE: When we had Ed on the book, it was amazing how dark you could get without feeling dark. When we worked with Walter, because his style is so much darker, all of a sudden it was like, wow, Deadpool's really scary. The Blind Al issue comes to mind, with him killing the dogs and stuff. If Ed had drawn that it would have had such a different feel. Matt and I actually ended up having to ratchet some of the stories back a little for our own comfort zone, but we also really exploited how real it would look, knowing that when we want to upset people we've got the guy who can do it. It's the clearest example in my career of how the art directly impacts upon the story. That was a great lesson to have. Pete was maybe a little bit closer to the Ed side on the cartooniness, but his storytelling has always been out of the park, and he could really carry the acting extremely well on all the characters. Everybody did a great job on that book. I tend to write a detailed script and I was always extremely happy with the pages I got back. Like you said, I was the luckiest guy in comics – great artists to work with on a fantastic character.

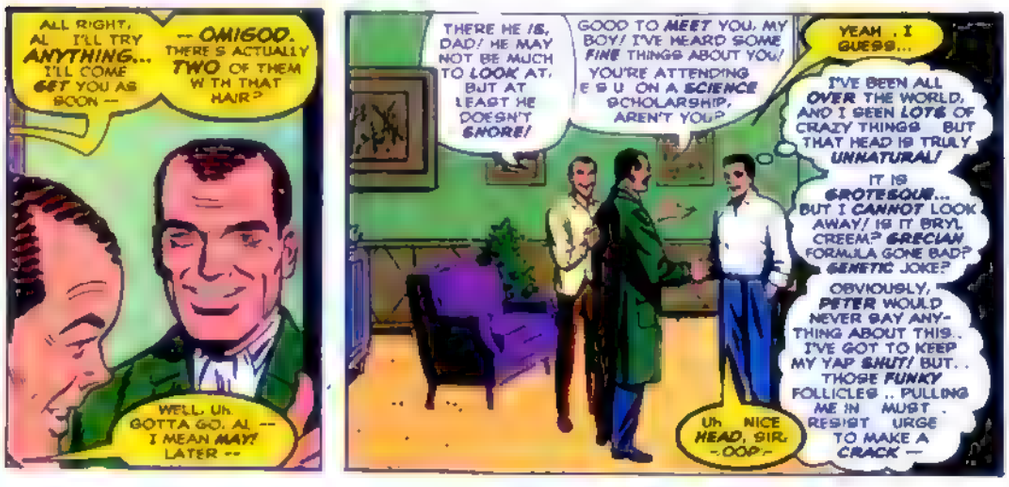
"I've always thought that a fight between Spidey and Deadpool devolves into a mama joke contest." – Kelly

SPOTLIGHT: You mentioned the darkness in there, a lot of which came from Wade's treatment of Blind Al. That was a pretty complex relationship you developed – Stockholm Syndrome to the Nth Degree. That really helped show the reader that Wade was not your average super hero.

JOE: Absolutely. My primary thesis for Deadpool is that this was a guy who really was broken and sincerely believed he wanted to do something better, but was constitutionally incapable of being better. That was his internal conflict. He really did think he could be a good person if life was a little different, but he just couldn't. The idea was to surround him with people who would complement those extremes. I try to build in a lot of long story relationships and reveals. Al was probably the best example of that. We never got around to the stories that were gonna explain why she was the way she was. In my version, in a different world, she was the one that actually contributed to him getting cancer in the first place. So she was sort of paying for sins she had committed in her youth. This was stuff that we knew from the beginning. The stuff about him not being Wade and taking that name from T-Ray, that came over time. But Deadpool and Al's relationship we had from the beginning. I wanted to do the reversal of "Oh, it's the funny butler. Oh wait, she's a prisoner. Oh wait, she wants to be there because she got him sick…." Those turns have a great pay-off if you can get to them over time.

SPOTLIGHT: Was Al planned to look like Aunt May with the now classic #11 specifically in mind?

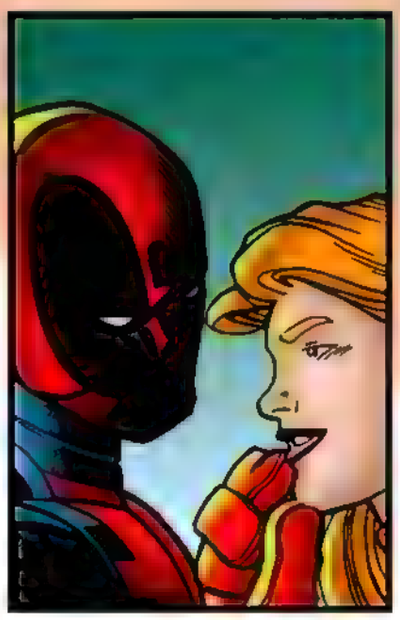
JOE: I don't think it's any secret that Deadpool was meant to be Dark Spider-Man. So we said, "Let's have a messed up Aunt May." And because she's the sidekick, let's call her Alfred. We couldn't do that, so that's why she became Blind Al. She's the Aunt May who really would be abused by the dark Spider-Man. That issue was Matt saying, "I think we could *Forrest Gump* Deadpool into a Spidey comic." It was a perfect opportunity to mess with their visuals.

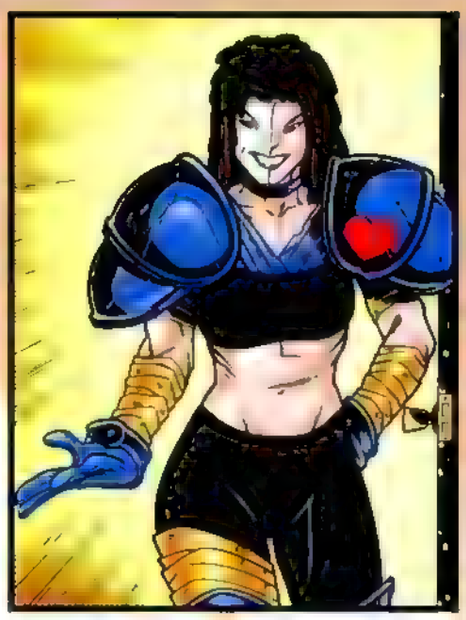

ALL RIGHT, AL I'LL TRY ANYTHING... I'LL COME GET YOU AS SOON --
-- OMIGOD. THERE'S ACTUALLY TWO OF THEM WITH THAT HAIR?
WELL, Uh GOTTA GO, AL -- I MEAN MAY! LATER --
THERE HE IS, DAD! HE MAY NOT BE MUCH TO LOOK AT, BUT AT LEAST HE DOESN'T SNORE!
GOOD TO MEET YOU, MY BOY! I'VE HEARD SOME FINE THINGS ABOUT YOU! YOU'RE ATTENDING E S U ON A SCIENCE SCHOLARSHIP, AREN'T YOU?
YEAH . I GUESS...
I'VE BEEN ALL OVER THE WORLD, AND I SEEN LOTS OF CRAZY THINGS BUT THAT HEAD IS TRULY UNNATURAL!
IT IS GROTESQUE... BUT I CANNOT LOOK AWAY! IS IT BRYL CREEM? GRECIAN FORMULA GONE BAD? GENETIC JOKE?
OBVIOUSLY, PETER WOULD NEVER SAY ANY-THING ABOUT THIS.. I'VE GOT TO KEEP MY YAP SHUT! BUT.. THOSE FUNKY FOLLICLES .. PULLING ME IN! MUST . RESIST URGE TO MAKE A CRACK --
Uh NICE HEAD, SIR. -OOPS-

FOLLICLE FOOLISHNESS: Kelly's hilarious "Gumping" of Osborn hair, with Deadpool posing as Peter Parker. (Art from *Deadpool #11* by Pete Woods with John Romita Sr.)

SPOTLIGHT: How fun was that "Gumping" process?

JOE: Oh, it was great. It was not fun for Matt and all the production guys. I think Pete almost went crazy. But it was a blast for me to take that story and mess around with it. We actually had Stan (Lee)'s blessing, which was really cool. It was great to get to do that, so insane. Again, we were in the land of "nobody cares what we're doing" so why the heck not?





DEADPOOL'S DAMES: Kelly's gaggle of girls included (left to right) Siryn, Typhoid Mary and Death.

SPOTLIGHT: Was it hard to pick which *Amazing Spider-Man* issue to "Gump?"

JOE: Matt had been looking back in the archives and he found this issue where not a lot happens, but the best part about it is this one scene, and when you read it untouched it's just as funny…

SPOTLIGHT: I think I know which one you're going to say…

JOE: Yeah, when MJ walks in. Aunt Anna's like, "Could you help us move these heavy boxes," and she's, like, "Sure, wait a second…I'll start dancing!" Whether she was just meant to be played as an airhead or is literally drugged out of her mind, it was funny, and so ludicrous to us, and we just thought we could make so much of this. (*Amazing Spider-Man* editor) Steve Wacker actually suggested I have to send Spidey into an old *Deadpool* comic. Oh my God, someday we'll pull that off. It's like *Back to the Future III*, or *II*, I don't remember which one…

SPOTLIGHT: Wade and Norman Osborn are bitter rivals these days, but you got to tell the tale of their first meeting in that issue. Tell us the truth, how many hours did you spend just making up Osborn hair jokes for that one?

JOE: *(Laughter.)* That was one of those where I was worried about people actually getting mad. That hair is a comic book conceit that has just stuck. It's so funny to me to see people draw that hair today. There are so many options, but some guys go for the strict cornrow look. To have Deadpool say that out loud, I know a lot of fans were like, "I've been thinking that my entire life, I'm glad somebody's said it…"

SPOTLIGHT: The crossover is an example of something you did from the start – take Wade out of the X box and play with all Marvel's other toys. Do you think it was important to expand his horizons a bit?

JOE: I think so. I'm not always allowed to do it on a mainstream book but, as often as possible, I go in and say let's put the big toys aside for a while and try to build new characters or throw in some unexpected stuff. The hope is that you're gonna find the Kingpin. He started out a Spidey villain, but he became something amazing when you put him with Daredevil. To play around with the dough a little bit and see what comes out of it is important to me. The X stuff is also so complicated; it's nice to get a little breather. In the initial proposal (it's probably good that it never saw the light of day), Deadpool was sent to the oddest corners of the Marvel Universe. We had him fighting Ego the Living Planet, Obnoxio the Clown – really out there characters with no touchstones. Having the right kind of touchstones was the right idea.

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of touching, Wade had quite a few romantic moments in your run, with three different ladies. Say Siryn, Typhoid Mary and Death are all behind the screen on *The Dating Game* – which one does Wade pick?

JOE: That's an excellent question. Would Death even say anything? Every question would be met with stony silence. If so, he'd probably pick her out of spite. But I think he'd probably end up with Typhoid Mary because he'd think he'd be getting three-for-one.

SPOTLIGHT: Now, Deadpool and Spidey. First time you crossed them over, you didn't even have them meet! That's something you're going to put right during your *Amazing Spider-Man* run, in #611, right?

JOE: Yeah, absolutely. Deadpool is hired to directly interface with Spidey, track him down and mess with his head. Shenanigans ensue. If I was *really* gonna do a hardcore Spidey/Deadpool team-up, I'd do a three-issue story and give it some meat. So I said to Steve, "If it's just a one-off, are you cool with it really being kind of rompy?" And he's like, "I think that's what people want!" So it's a little on the ludicrous side, but it ties into the bigger continuity with Spider-Man and kicks off the Gauntlet story in its way. There's a slow intro into both characters and a contrast of how their internal monologues work – sometimes it's a subtle difference, but mostly it's self-effacing "universe hates me all the time" Peter Parker and Wade Wilson insanity. They're directly duking it out, and I've always thought that a fight between Spidey and Deadpool devolves into a mama joke contest.

SPOTLIGHT: Is Wade Peter without the responsibility?

JOE: That really would be the question for a deeper book. The short answer is absolutely. There's so much I'd like to do with the two characters, there's so much to mine with two guys who suffered and chose to deal with that suffering in drastically different ways. It's like the Batman/Joker relationship; one snapped in a different way and chose to be a bit more productive. Wade became a nihilist. I think that relationship would exist between these two guys, we just need more time to flesh that out. Although there is a moment where Deadpool starts to crack on Spidey's mother and they realize they both have tragic histories.

SPOTLIGHT: Is a deeper team-up something we'll see from you any time soon?

JOE: I would like to do something, it just boils down to "how much time do I have?" This is the first time I've ever gone back to writing a character. It's not a rule; I just don't tend to revisit characters I've written in the past. It's actually kind of intimidating. To be back in that character was definitely fun, but I'm a different writer. It's been a while, it's a challenge.

SPOTLIGHT: You're also revisiting Wade in the pages of the landmark #900. It doesn't seem like 75 years since you wrote #1, does it?

JOE: I've held up pretty well! Axel Alonso asked me to participate but I couldn't do a lead story. It's a little standalone, a 10-pager. If anything it gives you a glimpse into his childhood.

SPOTLIGHT: And it's illustrated by Deadpool co-creator Rob Liefeld. What's that been like?

JOE: Really cool. When I saw the pages I was really happy. He's always been very cool to me. I've said to him, I owe you. He's very nice about *Ben 10*; his kids love it. It's funny, I have very vivid memories of where I was in my life when he did the Spike Lee commercial and really being jealous of him as a human being. Here I am graduating college, not happy with where I was, and this guy's drawing X-Men, what the hell! The fact that my first breakout gig was a character he created, that irony is not lost on me. I'll always appreciate it. It's very cool to finally get to work with him on it.

SPOTLIGHT: And after being out of print for years, your run is getting collected in *Deadpool Classic* trades. Are you getting much feedback from new fans?

JOE: A little bit. San Diego was interesting this year. It's funny how Deadpool really blew up. I had three lady Deadpools show up this year, which I thought was pretty remarkable. One had katanas, guns, the whole bit. Yellow Post-its to be her caption boxes! There's not usually that kind of crossover. I've never seen a female Cap at a con or a lady Iron Man. After seeing them, I thought, hmm, Lady Deadpool…

HE SHOOTS! He scores! Kelly and McGuinness send up the Scarlet Spider/Clone Saga.

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of female Deadpool fans, I have to tell you, way back in college I showed your *Deadpool* comics to a friend of mine, and she loved them. Obviously, I had to marry her. So I have you (and Deadpool) to thank for my marriage, now going strong in its seventh year!

JOE: Excellent! That is a very cool story. That's the first marriage story I've ever heard. One of the things I've always said about Deadpool fans, and what made it so heartbreaking for me to leave, they are this really voracious fanbase doing everything they could to protect the book. When they knew the book was in danger they were really aggressive about trying to keep it. Deadpool fans are like the best fans in the world. They fall in love with that character and stick with him. Whatever hand I had in shaping that I'm very proud of. I grew up with Spider-Man, I love Spider-Man, but there were many, many years where I did not pick up a Spider-Man comic. Deadpool fans are not like that, they're hardcore!

Speaking of hardcore, it's a dream come true to see Joe's name in the credits for DEADPOOL #900, in stores in October! And don't forget to check out the Joe Kelly tales of yore, available in DEADPOOL CLASSIC VOL. 1-3 trade paperbacks!

Cover art to *Deadpool* #71 by Jason Pearson.

Wolverine: Origins Scribe DANIEL WAY Makes Hay With Another Loose Cannon In The MU...Deadpool!

BY CHRIS ARRANT

DEADPOOL!

They say writing is all about getting inside the head of the characters. To know what they'd think, how they'd react, and what they'd do in whatever situation they're placed in. But what if the character is crazy? For many, that might be a risky scenario. But if any comics writer could fit the profile, it'd be writer Daniel Way. The Michigan-born thirty-something has been a familiar face at the House of Ideas in recent years, primarily for writing *Wolverine: Origins* and *Venom*. He's known as a loose cannon by some of the comics press, but that irreverence and skill seems perfectly at home for writing the character of Deadpool (and makes him one of *Spotlight*'s favorite interview subjects!) Way first crossed paths with the "Merc With a Mouth" in a five-issue arc of *Wolverine: Origins*, and that pairing provided epic...epic enough to spin off an ongoing series for Deadpool, reteaming Way with artist Paco Medina – who had previously worked with him on *Venom*. Fast forward almost two years and Way is still at the helm, creating some zany moments, unpredictable situations, and a character who isn't afraid to camp it up – while still being one of the deadliest mercenaries in the Marvel U.

SPOTLIGHT: Recently, Deadpool has exploded – figuratively, and in some cases literally – in the Marvel Universe. Three titles, guest-starring in other books and talk of his own movie. Daniel, what do you think of the big surge?

DANIEL: Yeah. Deadpool does seem to be the new black, doesn't he? Obviously, as the writer of the main title, I think that's great – but what really impresses me is that fans are showing such support to a character that, not too long ago, was regarded as a B-lister. Faith in fandom: RENEWED!

SPOTLIGHT: The Merry Marvel Marching Society returns!

DANIEL: (*Laughter.*)

SPOTLIGHT: Well, maybe not. But moving on... in the recent *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* movie, it covered Deadpool when he was just Wade Wilson. Of course in the comics he's well into his Deadpool ways, but did you think Wade Wilson was in there somewhere?

DANIEL: Deadpool is Wade Wilson's armor against both the world around him and the war within him. If Wade didn't have the Deadpool persona, he'd probably end up like one of those guys you see wandering the streets in a bathrobe and arguing with traffic lights. So to answer your question: yes. Wade Wilson is integral to the character—he's what's under the mask.

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of movies, it's been said that a Deadpool movie is in the works spinning out of *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*. What would you like to see in a Deadpool movie?

DANIEL: Uhh...Deadpool?

GOBLIN'S GAUNTLET: Deadpool can't laugh his way out of Osborn's attack. (Art from *Deadpool #8* by Pace Medina.)

SPOTLIGHT: Spoken just like someone who has been writing the character for some time! I remember your first big foray into writing the character of Deadpool in a five-issue story arc in *Wolverine: Origins*. Was he someone you'd been looking forward to getting your hands on? What's the big allure of Deadpool for you?

DANIEL: I think I've said this in other interviews, but it really is the most honest answer: Deadpool has no rules. As a writer, that's extremely attractive. I can literally do anything with the character

SPOTLIGHT: And you've really done a lot with him. In the wake of Dark Reign, Deadpool's been really busy – between Nick Fury, Norman Osborn, the Thunderbolts he's been bouncing around all over. Without getting too messy, let us inside Deadpool's head to tell us what he thinks of the current situation.

DANIEL: He loves it! Deadpool, at his best, is a living, breathing reaction. For the past year (our time), there's been nothing *but* action in his life and it's been, in his opinion, completely rad. The worst thing that could've happened to him, did happen—he got paid off. Or, in his opinion, blown off. So now it's time to get some more action going.

SPOTLIGHT: In the story arc beginning in *Deadpool #15*, "Want You To Want Me," Deadpool questions his mercenary line of work and goes job-hunting. What's not to like about being a merc-for-hire for Deadpool?

DANIEL: It's short-term. Deadpool's looking for that permanent high, he wants to throw himself into a situation that can never resolve itself—that is always in flux. Because that's where he thrives.

SPOTLIGHT: The first place Deadpool goes for a new line of work is San Francisco – no not to run a trolley, but to join the X-Men. That has me scratching my head and ready to laugh out loud – where'd this idea come from, and why would Deadpool be so ... crazy?

DANIEL: The idea comes to him when he sees Cyclops making his "Utopia" speech; in his mind, Cyclops is speaking directly to *him*. In his mind, it all makes perfect sense. Then again, in his mind it would also make perfect sense for him to take up residence on the Island of Misfit Toys. That's our boy Wade!

SPOTLIGHT: Wade, aka Deadpool, is far from your typical character, even in the Marvel U. How is it writing such a non-standard and non-linear type character?

DANIEL: Fun. I mean, like, really, really fun. I think that I've really found an outlet with the character to tell "my" kind of stories and that really...I dunno...feels good.

SPOTLIGHT: You've been on Deadpool going on the double-digits, with no sign of slowing down – what do you see in the future for the title and the character?

"BE THE MEAT": For more on this creative costuming – and one of the funniest sequences in Deadpool history – ya gotta buy the book! (Art from *Deadpool #11.*)

"In (Deadpool's) mind, (joining the X-Men) makes perfect sense."

– WRITER DANIEL WAY ON HIS POST-UTOPIA PLANS FOR 'POOL.

PIRATE 'POOL: It's a pirate's life for Wade and his parrot-costumed pal, Bob, in *Deadpool #13-14!* (Art by Shawn Crystal.)

DANIEL: The first year of the book was all about him proving to everyone—and himself—that he was the world's greatest mercenary. This next year will be about him proving to everyone—and himself—that he can be the world's greatest hero. Unfortunately for the resident heroes of the Marvel U, there are only two ways Deadpool thinks this can be done. 1) Learn from the best, or 2) Kill everyone that's better than him. From the outset, he's going with Plan A – but with Deadpool, you never know when he'll just flip out and go with Plan . U, or something. Because he's just like that. And that's why we love him. ●

Have your faith in Daniel Way renewed every month in* DEADPOOL*! The new storyline, "WANT YOU TO WANT ME", is in stores now with* DEADPOOL *#15!

FUNKY 'POOL MEDINA!

As Artistic Foil To Daniel Way, Penciler PACO MEDINA Takes Deadpool To The Edge And Back Again BY CHRIS ARRANT

Art from *Deadpool #10* by Paco Medina.

Deadpool's been one of those lucky characters who attract great artists; from his debut in 1991 under the auspices of Rob Liefeld, on through the hands of Joe Madureira, Ian Churchill, Ed McGuinness, and others, and now he's landed onto the drawing board of Paco Medina. ● After establishing himself with work on everything from Spider-Man to the X-Men Medina first ran into Deadpool in a two-issue arc of *Wolverine: Origins* which co-starred Deadpool. Medina's take, along with writer Daniel Way's scripting, started the drumbeat for a new ongoing series for the hilarious hired gun... and that drumbeat culminated with the new ongoing series in September 2008. ● Medina and Way have now carried on with the series into its double-digits – a nice achievement for the creative tandem in this modern era when teams don't last very long – and the artist took time away from his drawing table to talk about the book. And while he wasn't looking, we got an exclusive look at penciled pages from his run so far on *Deadpool!*

SPOTLIGHT: Paco, you've had good runs on several titles at Marvel, but *Deadpool* seems undoubtedly one of the strangest. What's it like working on the character?

PACO: I would say that rather than being a weird or strange character he is really funny! He has that weird thing of talking to himself with different personalities, making him so incredibly complicated that you never know what he is going to do next. As a penciler it keeps you always at the edge of the drawing table expecting new things. During this year working with *Deadpool*, I've kept myself anticipating every new crazy idea Daniel (Way, series writer) proposes, and it always turns out to be a great experience. I identify myself with Deadpool's crazy personality and I have a great time

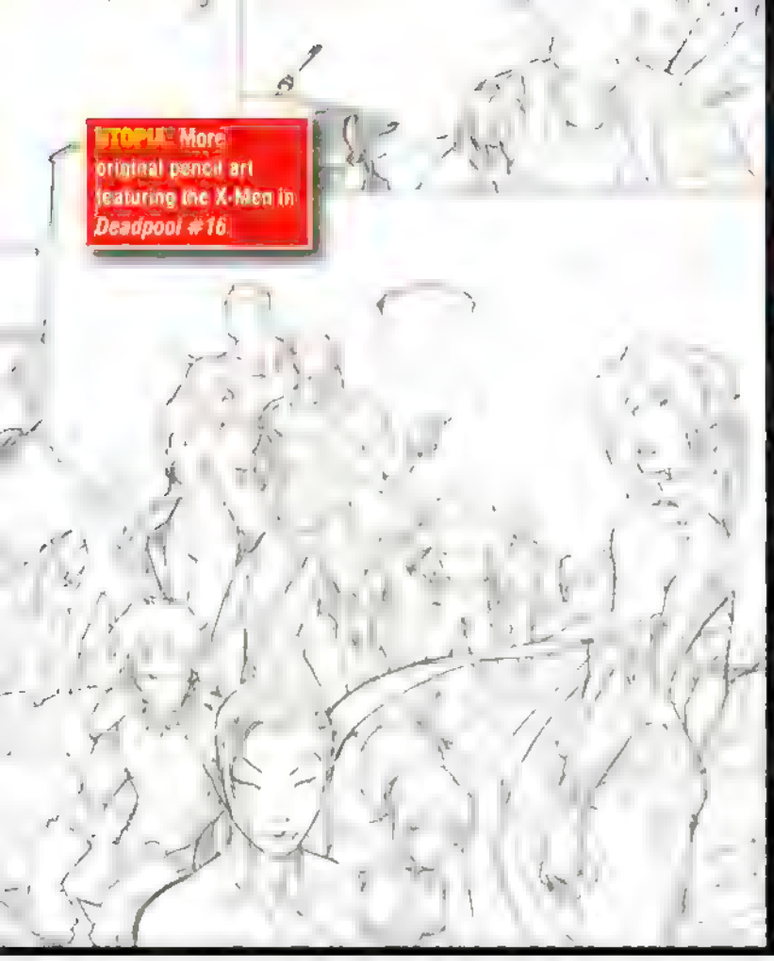
SPOTLIGHT: The character of Deadpool has proven extremely popular in recent movies, with the *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* movie and two other *Deadpool* series going on. What do you think of the character's success?

PACO: I had read some Deadpool stuff and it seemed to me like a character that had never been given attention, I thought Nobody had explored him a hundred percent

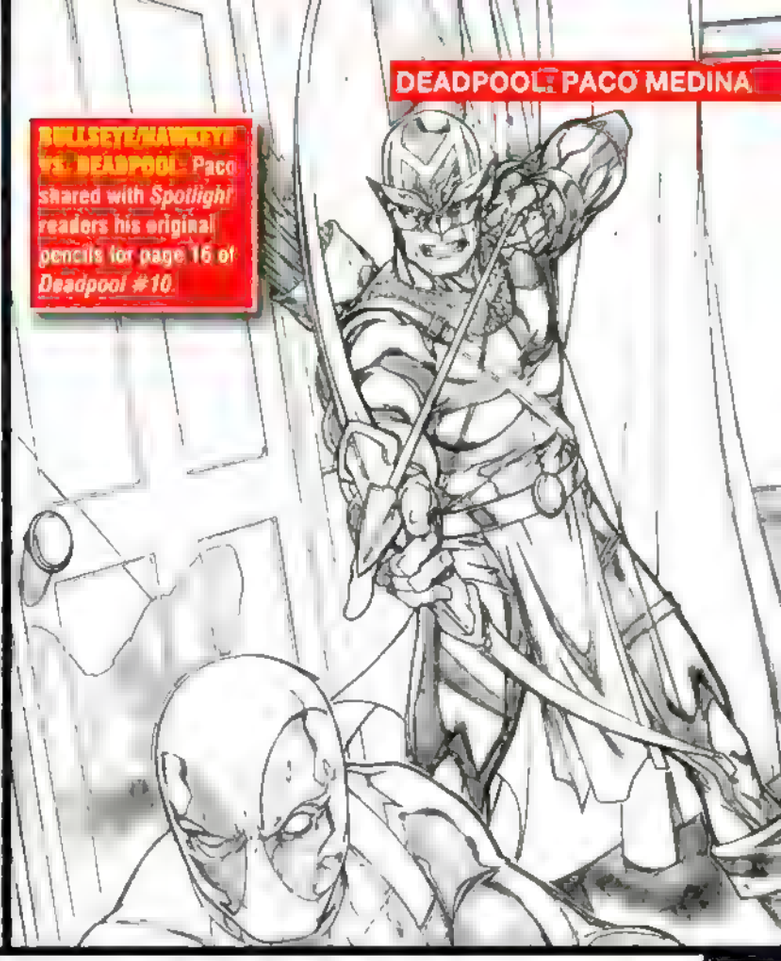
He is really one of those cult characters; a little bit underground and more for the fans' liking, but if you get to know that this guy can kick Wolverine's butt then I think it was time to put him under the spotlight.

SPOTLIGHT: For this title, you're working with writer Daniel Way. What do you think of the scenes and stories he's had you draw?

PACO: *(Laughter.)* I will say it this way: Sometimes after reading the script I talk over the phone with (series inker) Juan Vlasco, with Juan Mar the translator or with my daughter Monserrat just to tell them what new madness Deadpool has in store. And I do this because I could not have that much fun just by myself. You know, usually I like to see someone's reac-



SPOTLIGHT: More original pencil art featuring the X-Men in *Deadpool #16*



BULLSEYE/HAWKEYE VS. DEADPOOL: Paco shared with *Spotlight* readers his original pencils for page 16 of *Deadpool #10*

DEADPOOL: PACO MEDINA

tion before drawing what I have on the table. That makes me feel the possible readers' reaction

Really I couldn't be more happy, I know Daniel's work from some time ago, when we worked together on *Venom*. And since then I have felt a good chemistry with his writing. I have a great admiration for him and as a penciler I really couldn't ask for more. Daniel asks me to jump, I only ask him "how high?"

SPOTLIGHT: I won't ask you to jump, but I will ask you this – what would you say has been your favorite, or most memorable moment from what you've drawn in *Deadpool* so far?

PACO: Definitely Bullseye. *(Laughter.)* Poor guy. Hey, but the whole series up to this moment has been filled with great moments…. tell me, who else would have thought of fooling the Skrulls that way in the middle of an invasion? Or what about the meat armor

SPOTLIGHT: *(Laughter.)* Who could forget about the meat armor?

PACO: I don't know what it is, but the great thing of each story is that you never know what he will do. You can expect anything and that is what I enjoy the most

SPOTLIGHT: I found a real rarity passed on to me by someone at Marvel: a Deadpool Christmas card image you did, which pictures him in a more playful and less, shall we say, *violent* pose than we might typically see him in. How'd it come about?

PACO: Well, it was last Christmas; in the beginning it was something personal for my friends. Let's just say that I painted it and used it to decorate my house door instead of the typical Christmas ornament. After that I sent it as a Christmas card for all my friends and that is how it got to you. And well, who says Deadpool is violent? Deadpool is as cute as a little boy playing with his slingshot...

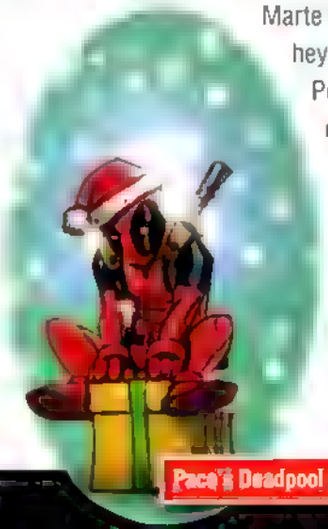
SPOTLIGHT: *(Laughter.)* Hey, I didn't know you knew the kids in my neighborhood! Paco, your work shows a real enthusiasm for the character, so I have to ask – what do you think of the character of Deadpool himself?

PACO: As I was saying before I feel identified with that part where he talks to himself. I mean, it's not like I'm a psycho artist with multiple personalities! *(Laughter.)* But, trust me, when one spends as much time at the drawing table as I do, one starts to live a second life in the paper. And there's been more than a few times I've noticed myself talking to myself, to scold or congratulate myself. But when I got the first script I loved it, just imagine... first I couldn't stop laughing seeing how this guy did the same thing as me. *(Laughter.)*

I'm really happy with this book. And I'm thankful to my editors Axel Alonso and Jody LeHeup for taking my work to give life to him. Obviously with Daniel, and also it is a luxury to be able to work with friends like (inker and colorist) Juan Vlasco and Marte Gracia, the colorist, my countrymates. (And hey, Deadpool loves to eat tacos!) Or Mr. Jason Pearson's covers, I never imagined working with one of my idols.

What happens is that the whole *Deadpool* team has this incredible chemistry and that shows beyond the paper! ●

You said it, Paco! We hope the chemistry remains the same as the Way/Medina team continue the ongoing DEADPOOL series!



Paco's Deadpool Christmas card!

GAMES OF DEATH AND SUICIDE KINGS

Writer Mike Benson Teams Up With Deadpool For A Trio Of Tales and Team-Ups!

By John Rhett Thomas

In two short years, writer Mike Benson has hopped over from Hollywood, where he has a successful career as a writer and producer for hit shows like The Bernie Mac Show and Entourage, to work in comics, where he's developed quite an entourage of characters that have had great stories told under his tenure. Much like Daniel Way, another fixture on the Deadpool scene (and subject of this issue of Spotlight!), Mike has introduced himself to readers through the anti-heroes and loose cannons of the Marvel super hero set. In Mike's case, the credits roll thusly: Wolverine in the *Chop Shop* one-shot, 16 issues of *Moon Knight*, and three, count 'em, three different Deadpool projects: the gloriously zany *Games of Death* one-shot, the team-up-palooza of *Deadpool: Suicide Kings* mini-series, and now a feature slot in the upcoming *Deadpool Team-Up* series. If this all seems to be too overwhelming for Mike, fear not. He and the little voices in his head got together with *Spotlight* to talk about Deadpool (and the little voices inside *his* head) and some of the other high-water marks in what is turning out to be a fun career in comics!

SPOTLIGHT: So Mike, you came into comics from television screenwriting and producing. What about your experiences on shows like Entourage and The Bernie Mac Show lends itself to comics writing – for instance, when it comes to pitching, meeting deadlines, and pacing your scripts?

MIKE: Deadlines, no doubt. I'm used to a quick turn around. Aside from that, in TV you need to be collaborative and I enjoy that very much. If someone has a better idea than what's on the table, by all means I'll go with it. I try not to let ego get in the way of making the material the best it can be.

SPOTLIGHT: Anytime we talk with someone who has come into comics from another field of writing, we like to establish comic book bona fides. Can you give a little background on the comics you read as a kid, what you liked growing up?

MIKE: First off, as a kid I was a total Marvel zombie. My favorite books were *Moon Knight, The Avengers, Master of Kung Fu, Iron Man* and *Daredevil.* I also really dug *Power Man and Iron Fist.* Those were my main titles, but I collected all things Marvel. Frank Miller was writing his seminal Daredevil run and that just brought the whole fanboy experience to a whole new level. I also remember being pretty obsessed with anything that Gene Colan and Jack Kirby did. And I'm still pretty obsessed with their art now. I actually own a few pieces.

SPOTLIGHT: Which pieces of art, Mike? *Spotlight* fans wanna know!

I have a couple of Colan *Tomb of Dracula* pages. A beautiful Kirby *New Gods* page. Also, I have a Bob Layton "Demon in a Bottle" recreation cover that Bob gave me as a gift.

SPOTLIGHT: Before we jump into all things Deadpool, can you tell us a little about your first work for Marvel on *Moon Knight*? Had you been reading the Charlie Huston series up to that point?

MIKE: Heck, yeah. At that point I had no idea I'd actually be writing for Marvel, but I was devouring Charlie's MK books. They had a tone and grit I really respond to as a reader, and Charlie is such a talented writer. After reading his comics, I started in on his Joe Pitt novels. But enough about Charlie, let's talk more about me! (*Laughter.*) I'm joking, Charlie's a bud.

Cover to Deadpool: Suicide Kings #2 by Mike McKone.

SPOTLIGHT: What was the key thing you wanted to do in transitioning from Charlie's storyline to yours?

MIKE: Well, because I wasn't launching the title, because I was taking over the reins, I didn't want to change directions. Moon Knight fans, such as myself, really appreciated what Charlie was doing. There had been a few incarnations of *Moon Knight* that didn't work at all in my opinion. Charlie was staying true to Doug Moench's *Moon Knight* and that's the interpretation I responded to myself. So for me, it was playing out Moon Knight's natural trajectory that Huston set in place. I think that's why we originally got along so well and why Charlie decided to stay on board and work with me. It was a terrific experience. I guess if anything I wanted to dip Moonie's toe into the deep end of the Marvel pool – and that really came to fruition when he went up against the Thunderbolts. I also wanted to keep the book as a team book and use Marlene, Frenchie and the rest of the gang.

"Deadpool at first was a terribly hard character to write."

– Writer Mike Benson

SPOTLIGHT: The last arc of Moon Knight introduced the Zapata Brothers (more on them later), guest-starred Punisher, and featured the strikingly moody art of Jefte Palo. All things considered, I think this is one of the best stories published by Marvel in recent years, so to save me the trouble of gushing, can you share what you consider to be the high marks you hit with "Down South?"

MIKE: That's really nice of you to say. Well as you know, MK killed off his Marc Spector persona. And he needed a place to hang his hat and regroup. And so Mexico seemed like one of those places people go to get lost. And because MK was in such a predicament, it gave me the opportunity to tell a much smaller story and put him on the path to being a true hero again, which was always my intention.

That said, I wanted the tone of the arc to feel like a Sam Peckinpah film. Something dark and gritty and Jefte Palo was just the man to deliver on that vision.

SPOTLIGHT: Can you give us a little background on the Zapata Brothers? They were a good element of comic relief in an otherwise bloody, dark story. Are you a fan of lucha libre?

MIKE: I don't know if I'd say I'm a fan as much as I appreciate the look and style. (But I am a fan of *Nacho Libre!)* The Zapata Brothers were characters Axel Alonso and myself created. It's funny, but we set out to create Toltec, who I'd like to explore more, but we just started bantering and came up with a couple of Lucha Libre hitmen. We both got really excited and they eventually became the Zapatas.

SPOTLIGHT: You went for Punisher in both your last arc of *Moon Knight* and the *Deadpool: Suicide Kings* miniseries, both of which showed very different sides of Frank Castle (deadly serious/comic relief). Is he a character you'd like a crack at in a more long-form series?

MIKE: One hundred percent, yes. I really became a fan of Castle – as did many others – when Garth Ennis started writing him. His run on *Punisher* was as important to me as when Frank Miller was doing *Daredevil.* I've never met Garth but I can say without hesitation, he's my favorite comic writer.

MOON KNIGHT: Mike's first ongoing title at Marvel was Moon Knight. The "Down South" arc guest-starred Punisher and featured the menace of Toltec. (Art from *Moon Knight* #28 by Jefte Palo.)

GAMES OF DEATH: One of which included Deadpool's bum getting chewed off by a hungry tiger! (Art from *Deadpool: Games of Death* by Shawn Crystal.)

SPOTLIGHT: So, Moon Knight, Punisher and Deadpool: Who's crazier?

MIKE: I'd say Moon Knight, Deadpool, and then Punisher.

SPOTLIGHT: Wow! I wouldn't have guessed that order. MK tops the list? What's your gut on why?

MIKE: Multiple personalities tops hearing voices and the occasional hallucination.

SPOTLIGHT: Now, picking up on Deadpool, if "Down South" from *Moon Knight* was one of the best series, the *Deadpool: Games of Death* one-shot is one of the most hilarious stand-alone stories. You really brought the funny with that one. I assume that's easier to do with Deadpool than, say, Wolverine?

MIKE: I have to introduce you to my wife and you can tell her how great I am. (*Laughter.*) Actually no. The Wolverine one-shot I did – *Chop Shop* – was one of the easiest books I've written – and one of my favorites, too. Deadpool at first was a terribly hard character to write. I didn't know much about him, so I went back and read everything I could get my hands on. *Games of Death* was a difficult script to write because I didn't have a great feel for the character and so it was really trying to me to find his voice. I look back at the comic and see so many things I would've done differently now. Now I feel much more confident and understand the delicate balance between comedy and action; what works and what doesn't.

"I feel much more confident and understand the delicate balance between comedy and action; what works and what doesn't."

– Benson on writing Deadpool

SPOTLIGHT: The introduction of the players in the underground reality show was pretty great. Do any of these characters have real life inspirations?

MIKE: Well, they were modeled after action heroes – such as Steven Seagal, DMZ, Claude Van Damme, and the great Chuck Norris.

AND SO, ALL I'M ASKING YOU, MR. WADE, IS THAT YOU GIVE ME YOUR ALL. A HUNDRED-AND-TEN PERCENT AND THEN SOME. AM I MAKING MYSELF CLEAR?
LOUD AND CLEAR, MR. KILGORE. LOUD AND CLEAR.
SUCKER

Deadpool negotiates with his new client. (Art from *Games of Death* by Crystal.)

NO PLACE LIKE... HUH? Benson and artist Carlo Barberi send up *Wizard of Oz* with a Skottie Young homage in *Suicide Kings #4.*

SPOTLIGHT: The whole book, with your pacing and Shawn Crystal's slick, stylized art, was pretty hilarious. Does comedy writing come easily to you?

MIKE: Any type of writing for me is hard. However, I think comedy is one of the few things that can't be taught. You're either funny or you're not – and then there are the different levels of funny. I've always been confident that I'm funny and could make people laugh when I wanted to. Writing comedy however is all about how you look at things through your very own lens. Sometimes it just spills out. Other times not so much. When I'm working with my pal Adam Glass, who co-wrote *Suicide Kings* and *Luke Cage Noir*, we both make each other laugh so much that at times it doesn't even feel like work.

SPOTLIGHT: That led into *Suicide Kings*, a five-issue mini that just wrapped up, and also guest-starred Punisher, Daredevil and Spider-Man. Can you talk a little about what you achieved with that series?

MIKE: I think Adam and I accomplished what we wanted to. To have a fun, yet fairly grounded (at least for a DP comic) story.

SPOTLIGHT: Now, you're primed to write an issue of *Deadpool Team-Up*, reuniting with Shawn Crystal. Your association with Deadpool has turned into a nice handful of stories. Are we going to see more from you with Wade Wilson?

MIKE: You sure are. Actually, I'm in the process of breaking out another story with my boy, Adam Glass. It's going to be a lot of fun and a very cool story told from a very different POV.

SPOTLIGHT: You'd mentioned *Luke Cage Noir*, which will be wrapping up as this issue of *Spotlight* hits the stands. What else can readers look forward to with your name on it in the forthcoming months?

SPOTLIGHT: I did a killer Shang-Chi one-shot with Tomm Coker and also a short with Bullseye that I can't say much about but it's pretty cool. Aside from that, I'll be doing a couple of issues of *Amazing Spider-Man* and some more Deadpool books.

There you go, friends, your Spotlight introduction to a future Marvel A-lister. If you haven't read Suicide Kings or Games of Death yet, look no further than the DEADPOOL: SUICIDE KINGS PREMIERE HARDCOVER, in stores now! •

GAMESHOW GORE: Deadpool wins it all in Games of Death! (Art by Shawn Crystal.)

DEADPOOL #900 PREVIEW

Preview art from *Deadpool #900* by Dalibor Talajic and Matt Hollingsworth.

BULLPEN BULLETINS

ITEM! Hey, you know who's really great? Kieron Gillen! The British writer – known for *Phonogram*, an Image series that incorporates his love of music – recently opened the door to the House of Ideas and made himself at home with the *Beta Ray Bill: Godhunter* limited series and its awesome lead-in one-shot, *Beta Ray Bill: The Green of Eden*. Working with ol' Horsehead proved Kieron can really handle the larger-than-larger-than life characters, those whose adventures are on a higher scale than your average super hero. That has us all kinds of excited for a pair of his upcoming projects right in his wheelhouse. October sees the release of *Dark Avengers: Ares* #1 (of 3), featuring one of the decade's breakout characters, the God of War himself! And moving to another pantheon, Kieron will be stepping into J. Michael Straczynski's shoes to write the next epic Thor story, beginning with November's *Thor #604*. As if that's not enough, November also sees the launch of *S.W.O.R.D. #1*, a new ongoing book that shines the light on the agency created by Joss Whedon in the pages of *Astonishing X-Men* and stars Agent Brand, Beast and Lockjaw! Mr. Gillen will be handling writing chores on this one as well. In short, you'll be hearin' from Kieron!

ITEM! You like holidays, right? And Spectaculars…you like them too, don't you? Then you, my friend, are going to flat out *love* the *Marvel Holiday Spectacular*. This magazine format X-Mas Extravaganza is going to be full to bursting with everything that makes the holiday season – and the Marvel Universe – great. From classic Christmas stories to an interview with one S. Claus to a gift-giving guide and more, the *Marvel Holiday Spectacular* is going to pack more Christmas cheer than a stocking full of X-Baby dolls.

ITEM! Did someone say X-Babies? I'm afraid they did! Proving everything comes back around eventually, the pint-sized mutants make a big return in October in the four-issue series *X-Babies*. Believe it or not, they're bringing along the characters from the STAR Comics line (Marvel's kid-friendly line from the 80's) with them. *X-Babies* will be brought to you by writer Gregg Schiegiel and artist Jacob Chabot. And check out the adorable covers by the Marvel's own wizard of "Oz," Skottie Young!

ITEM! Did you get a load of those "Wolverine Art Appreciation" variant covers we did earlier this year? Odds are, even if you did, you weren't lucky enough to grab all of them. How would you like to own these terrific images anyway? First, for those who don't even know what the heck we're talking about, here's the skinny: This past April, for Wolverine's 35th anniversary, Marvel offered a unique twist on the 1 in 10 variant cover concept. We asked artists to reproduce a famous work of art and incorporate everybody's favorite hairy Canadian super hero (no, not Puck!) into the picture. The results, by artists ranging from Gerald Parel to Ed McGuiness to Russ Heath, were a lot of fun. Too fun, in fact, to hide their light under a bushel! That's why this October we're collecting them all in the *Wolverine Art Appreciation* one-shot. This cool collection will feature not only all of the original covers, but will feature commentary from the artists as they discuss plugging Logan into adaptations of Van Gogh, Dali, etc. If that sounds fun, or if you simply want to own something titled with the unlikely combination of words "Wolverine Art Appreciation" – then go to your LCS and ask for it by name!

To find Marvel Comics at a local comic shop, call 1-888-COMICBOOK or visit marvel.com

THE SOAPBOX

Hulk. Hawkeye. Wolverine. Do you ever get confused by the number of heroes (or would-be heroes) running around with the same name? It can be very difficult having a conversation in a comic shop these days because when you say, "That She-Hulk sure is hot!", the response you get is likely, "You mean Jen Walters? Or the one dressed as Thundra? Or do you mean the new red one?" How embarrassing. The last thing you want is to say the wrong one and start a nasty argument. So you say, "All three!" and they look at you funny for not being able to commit (although let's be honest – they *are* all hot!).

Let's face it: The most insidious aspect of Norman Osborn's Dark Reign is all of the super hero identities out there to keep up with. Now, there are some telltale signs as to which character you're dealing with. If Norman Osborn wants them dead, odds are it's the old, heroic version. If they are sitting at a conference room table with Norman, it's the new, villain-y version. If they just got their own book or took over a book, you're probably dealing with the new, some might say "fake," version of the character. Look inside to be sure. Are they disdainful of the people they are helping/rescuing? They probably are. (Jerks.) But, hey, that's what makes them interesting, right?

While we're all looking forward to Norman Osborn getting his comeuppance (almost as much as we we're looking forward to the same with Tony Stark!), it's a blast to see a bunch of ne'er-do-wells running around in charge for the time being. Even if a character isn't worthy of our sympathy, a good writer can tell a compelling story with that character in the lead (see *Dark Avengers* and *Thunderbolts*). If the character can be made sympathetic through the telling of the story, then you've really got something. This is one of the things that has made the Marvel Universe such an interesting place right now. There are books with the heroes we love raging against the Osborn machine, and books with characters brazenly trading off the heroes' names, up to no good and laughing about it. Best of all, you know they're going to pay eventually, and the heroes can triumphantly reclaim their names. Heck – could this all coincide with a certain star-spangled hero triumphantly reclaiming his title? We all love Bucky, but maybe for the world to make sense, the first hero we need back in place is Captain America. Just one fan's opinion…

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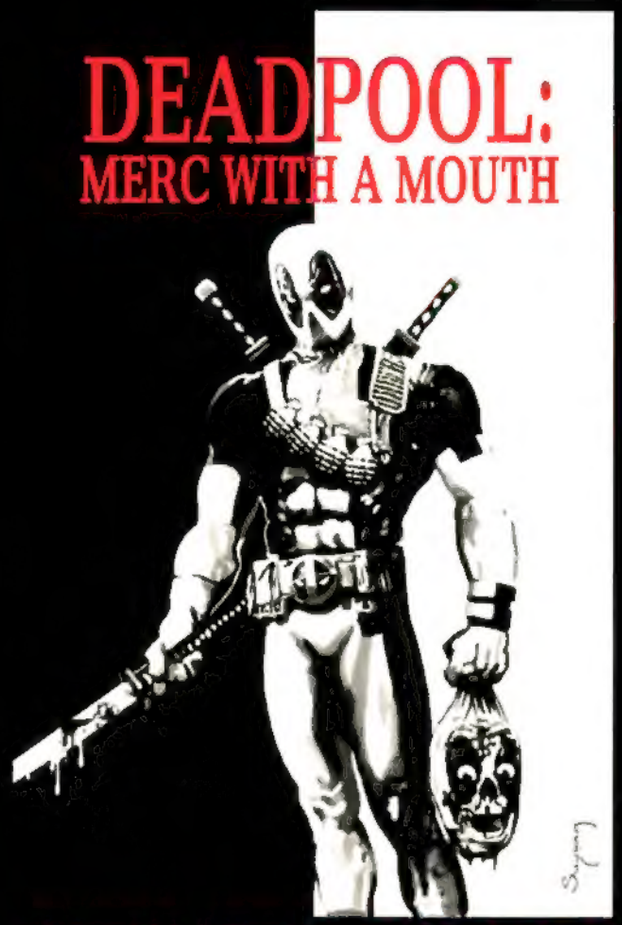

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